Book 5

Craig's Ground

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Chapter 1

Planning

At night, there opens a large building. It was formed like a house. It was situated next to a cliff and had a large field right next to it, supposedly belonging to the building. The lights were flashing and striking on while some people got out of the building. Those people looked as strange as the students of Open Book School. Louise walked out with the few people who had to leave too. Craig was with them.

Craig was walking with a girl. The girl had a green gown and pink underside. Her shoes were red high heels. She was about the same age as Craig and his classmates, so was everyone else. “How was school, huh Craig?”, the girl asked. She had a squeaky and high-pitched voice. “Fine, I guess”, Craig answered. He wore a major frown on his face while saying that. “Hehehe! I remember those good old days! When we used to be in Class 4! Hey, which class are you in now?”, the girl asked. Craig sighed. “Class 2”, Craig answered. The girl made out a wide gasp. “CLASS 2?!”, the girl yelled. “Shut up. They’re better than Class 3, at least”, Craig answered. “Or Class 1?”, the girl asked.

Craig paused for a minute and looked at her. “Sunny, a student of that class terrorized the entire school”, Craig answered. The girl gasped even more than before. “WHATTT?!”, she shouted. Everyone made a “hush hush” sound. The girl bit her tongue afterward. Craig sighed.

“A lot has changed, Sunny. There are students from the Brooklyn branch now. I’m sort of friends with one of them. Sid is his name. I knew a lot of them since Grade 7 but… there was this new guy…”,

Craig said. He looked up at the starry night sky. "… His name is Bruno", Craig continued. "Honestly, Bruno isn't **that** special, but he was a nice boy. He helped a lot in mystery solving. Yep. Now we solve the crimes instead of being hurt by who's committing it", Craig smiled. "Oh yeah, and Class 4… is now filled with tough students. Perhaps they were affected by what happened between them and Terrance. It also might be because of their new teacher, who is tough. Oh, and Terrance returned too", Craig explained. The girl, now named Sunny, looked curiously at Craig. "Gee, I sure have missed a lot", Sunny said. Craig nodded, then looked up at the night sky.

Craig eventually went through another path that led to his home. He waved goodbye at Sunny and Louise. "See ya soon!", Louise said. "Oh right. We have music class after tomorrow", Craig said. They walked back to their respective homes. Craig was only carrying his backpack by his right shoulder. The sky made the atmosphere dim and dark. The wood creaks through Craig's ears. Finally, the trees led to a house left alone in the forest. Well, it was more of a swamp than a forest. The house looked like it belongs to the suburbs. The only difference it has from a normal suburban house is the canopy and a dock nested next to the house. Craig stepped forward to the house, almost tripping on a rock covered in mud.

Craig's boots were covered by mud at that point. The mud was so deep that it almost reached Craig's pants. He finally reached the house's porch. Oddly enough, it wasn't covered in much mud, neither did the entire baseline of the house. The only traces of mud or any moistness is from the footprints of people who entered the house. Craig was one of them.

Craig made the door cry by opening it. Inside the home was a rustic interior. The couch was made of fabric which isn't so soft. Right next

to it was the TV. It was a small TV. Underneath it was the wooden hand-crafted table. On the other side was the kitchen. It had the obligatory oven, fridge and dinner table. Mixed onto that were the toaster, microwave and blender. Cabinets were filled with spices and other cooking necessities.

Craig looked around the rustic house and only found the jacket hanger. “Mom, dad, I’m home”, Craig announced. He walked towards the kitchen just to find his older brother eating his supper. It was macaroni and cheese. There were more supposedly saved for Craig. “Austin?”, Craig asked. Austin looked at Craig, then croaked out laughing. “There you are, l’il bro! I thought you got into a car crash or something”, Austin said. He got up and patted Craig’s shoulder. Craig pulled his shoulder away from his brother. “How could I get into a car crash if we’re living in a remote swamp?”, Craig asked. Austin shrugged and tried to ignore that question. “Where’s mom and dad anyways?”, Craig followed up asking. “They’re out, playing bingo with our aunts and uncles”, Austin answered. “Mom said that we’d have **this** for supper”, he continued, pointing at the macaroni and cheese while saying that. Craig sighed and then sat down.

He was eating when Austin turned on the TV in the other room. Luckily, Craig was on the right chair to watch the TV. Austin was watching South Park; a show Craig apparently loves. Craig, being the calm boy that he is, kept himself still while Austin was watching, unaware that his 13-year-old brother is watching an adult show with him. Yes, Austin is 17, slowly turning 18. Austin was planning his college out during that time.

When Craig finished his supper, he instantly jumped out of his chair, not even touching the plate, and ran in front of the TV. He blocked the way between the TV and Austin. As expected, Austin was frustrated.

Austin kept on looking left and right just to even view the TV without his brother blocking the way. The brother in question was watching the show and seemingly excited for what's about to come in the episode.

"Hey, Mr. Fanboy! Get back to eating!", Austin yelled. Craig turned his head back, still covering Austin's view. "Sorry, but I finished", Craig sarcastically apologized, finally walking away from the TV. "Ugh. Little brothers these days…", Austin sighed. As soon as Austin was left in peace, his brother suddenly pulled Austin's chair on the backside, nearly letting it fall down. "Austin! Can we watch The Office after this?", Craig suddenly asked. Austin yelped and fell from his seat. "Craig! Since when have you been watching these shows?!", Austin got up and asked once Craig let go of the chair and was on the ground. "… Since 2009…", Craig embarrassingly answered. Austin was going on fire, then breathed in and out.

"Fine. Fine enough. I mean, I started smoking when I was 12. Watching a show that references adult things is no different for you", Austin whispered to himself. Craig instantly raised an eyebrow once Austin said that. "You smoked?", Craig asked. Austin jumped and panicked. "HOW DID YOU HEAR THAT?!", Austin yelled. Craig wasn't scared at all. He was just impressed by Austin's overreaction. Austin looked at the clock for a moment. "I know everything, Austin", Craig said. Austin smiled at the sight of the clock. "Well, do you know **this**? It's bedtime", Austin said. Craig was bought to be stunned by his brother's response. He shut his mouth in fury. Craig instantly went upstairs by his cottage-like stairs while his brother smiled from the fact that he gave the "it's bedtime" card.

Craig jumped right into his bed. His bed was a normal bed. It had a nice blue cover over the mattress, there were white pillows and his

blanket was red. Craig's face was faceplanted into the pillow like he's a pancake. Then Craig propped himself up from the pillow He looked at his ceiling and sighed to himself. He turned his face to the wall and found pictures of him and his former classmates celebrating something hanging in the wall. That something is celebrating the time that Class 4 won "Best Class of The School" award. Quaver was standing in front of all his students while they were celebrating, holding the trophy. Craig had his smile, but frown afterwards in remembering his good old times with his friends.

After that, he looked at another picture. A picture of Craig, a scruffy boy, Louise and what looks to be Flax, all grinning, with only Craig not doing so. Craig frowned, looking down at his mattress covering. Then he remembered something. Once he did, he looked at a picture behind him. It was supposedly the last picture Craig had of Flax before he left to build a hangout for something. It was Flax, having a fist-bump with Craig while Craig was… smiling. Craig had a warm smile after seeing that.

"Then… he left…", Craig thought. Craig turned himself to the north and wondered if he could accomplish the same thing Flax once did. "Maybe… maybe I could do the same for my schoolmates…", Craig said to himself. Craig would then fantasize all the amazing things he'd do with a project like that. All the students would laugh and hang out—not in a strict, school environment but an open-minded one. Craig chuckled afterward.

It's odd how Craig's excitement didn't leave him to feel some sort of vital spirit in him when sleeping. Or perhaps it did since he couldn't sleep at all. All he thought about were his plans. The real question that has been killing Craig is: how would this work out? He most probably needs permission from the school officials and parents, since this project of his is targeted for the school. If the school finds out, then

he'd be in big trouble. At some point, Craig decides to let go of those worried and just keep things a big secret among him and his fellow schoolmates.

Craig was beginning to sleep well until…

"Cocka-doodle-dooooo!", something crowed. Craig was trying to drown those crows out through the use of his pillow.

"Cocka-doodle-dooooo!", but it was unsuccessful. Craig sighed. "Since when were there even chickens in the house?", Craig asked to himself. It must be someone messing with him if that's the case. Craig began to walk into the window.

"Cocka-doodle—". The crow got cut off as Craig opened the window and saw two boys. The boys froze then smiled in the distance. As Craig was up away from the view of the ground, he couldn't see those boys clearly enough to identify them. "I knew it!", Craig hissed. Craig went away from the window to grab something. "Wait! Wait! No!", one of the boys cried. Then Craig came back to the window and threw an entire toy box at one of the boys, breaking the box. "Stop intruding on this area!", Craig shouted out. "Wait! We can explain!", another boy said. Craig widened his eyes and his mind. He realized that it was…

"Riley? Sheldon?", Craig asked. The boys smiled and chuckled. "What are you doing here—in 12AM?", Craig asked. Riley sweated afterward. "About that: We just couldn't sleep because of the assignment. You know, the Math assignment", Riley answered. "I see", Craig responded. Craig looked around, then closed his window, leaving his bedroom. "Man, I didn't know Craig lived in such an environment", Sheldon said. Sheldon looked around the swampy forest and was disgusted by how wet and muddy it is.

Then Craig got out of his house, leaving the door closed. “Lucky; my parents didn’t come yet and Austin’s asleep”, Craig smiled to himself. “Your parents and… Austin?”, Riley asked. “Yep. Austin is my older brother. He was just awake, but I guess he went to sleep. And my parents are off to playing bingo”, Craig said. The boys laughed. “Playing bingo? Man! Are they, like, 65?”, Sheldon laughed. Craig looked unamused, but didn’t say a word.

“Well, you said something about the Math assignment, right?”, Craig asked. The two nodded. “Yup. It’s a group work between the three of us, so yeah”, Sheldon said. Craig put his head together and thought about whether he should work or go sleep. He decided he should do the former since he wanted to stay at a classmate’s house for a night. “Sure”, Craig said. “Yes! C’mon! To my place!”, Sheldon cheered. Sheldon ran faster than the two. “Wait for us!”, Riley yelled as he and Craig slowly followed Sheldon, but they were running like crazy.

The three finally reached Sheldon’s house. They were already in his bedroom, opening the door. “Welcome to my messy room!”, Sheldon welcomed. What Sheldon said was true. His room was covered in clothes, toys, and some other things. Sheldon looked like he could never even bother cleaning himself, let alone his room! “Just ignore those things, ok?”, Sheldon requested as the three passed through a pile of thousands of papers. Apparently, those papers were once papers from past school years.

“Class 1?”, Craig read from a paper. His brain brightened up once he saw that. “Ah! I remember now! You and Riley were once in Class 1, right?”, Craig asked. Sheldon and Riley nodded. “There’s a reason why we’re so cool!”, Riley said. Craig smiled alongside the duo. They continued their way to Sheldon’s working desk.

“Taadaa! I dub this desk as “Sheldon’s Corner Desk”! Or SCD for short”, Sheldon introduced with open arms. Riley clapped and smile while Craig wanted to look away from the messy desk. “Here is where I, as the name suggests, work! Mainly school work though. But here’s a little secret: I can sometimes play video games here. Specifically, PC games. You see, I steal my PC from my brother and secretly play PC games in Friday nights. Don’t tell my family about them!”, Sheldon whispered to the two. Riley nodded, then thought about that. “Say, would this really be a “work desk” if you’re playing games on it?”, Riley asked. Sheldon shut his mouth instantly after saying that. “Shh. Don’t ask me about the logic behind that!”, Sheldon whispered. Riley sighed.

Sheldon soon hopped into his chair and took his construction and blank-slated papers out. The other two boys looked at it, spinning their heads at the sight of it. “Is this…?”, Craig questioned. “… Yup! This is for the Math assignment!”, Sheldon assured. Sheldon took out his pencil from one of the many cabinets and started sketching out a complex cube and cone fusion. “So, Mr. Albert said something about calculating the area of two 3D shapes, right?”, Sheldon asked. Riley nodded. “And we have to draw them, but that’s what you’re doing now”, Riley chuckled.

Sheldon continued to sketch. Craig wasn’t about to say a single word though. All he thought of was his plans for the hangout. Craig could only hear feint voices coming from Riley and Sheldon’s mouths. “We have to explain how to calculate the area too!”, Riley added. Sheldon yawned right afterward. “We should’ve done the assignment last night. Can’t believe we even took a week since it started!”, Sheldon regretted. Riley ignored that and tried his best to help with Sheldon. Soon enough, the two noticed that Craig was distant. The boy was sitting on Sheldon’s rusty bed. “Hey Craig, you gotta help us, you know?”, Riley encouraged. Craig got out of his fantasy, realizing that

he's in another world. “Right”, Craig coughed up. He slowly approached the two who were working.

“Over here is where we write the explanation. I already drew the shapes. Riley, you can present it. Craig, I know you’re a smart guy, so you can do the calculating”, Sheldon planned. He took a deep look at the cold-faced Craig, then sighed. “Craig, are you even awake? I won’t blame you if you aren’t but—“. Sheldon got stopped by Craig suddenly saying something, breaking his previous silence.

“I… I have a dream!”, Craig exclaimed. Sheldon and Riley gave tilted looks at Craig. “That’s nice but—“. Sheldon got stopped again. “It involves the two of you! And me too”, Craig said. Sheldon and Riley were frozen solid. “Craig, we’re finishing an assignment now”, Riley said with sorrow. Craig shook that off though. “I have an assignment of my own”, Craig answered. Sheldon huffed after returning to the construction paper. “Typical Craig”, Sheldon brushed off. “It’s not! Riley, Sheldon. I apologize for interrupting the work, but hear me out. If you do, then we can continue and I’ll help”, Craig said. Sheldon sighed while Riley wore a soft smile. “Fine”, Sheldon said as he pushed his paper away.

“Riley, Sheldon. I want to build a hangout. A hangout for the grade”, Craig declared. The boy’s jaws dropped. “H-How can you do that?”, Riley asked. “And how can we help?”, Sheldon added. Craig smiled. “Glad you asked”, Craig responded. “You see, we could ask the officials for the school. Once we get permission, we could start construction on it from the help of our strong schoolmates and maybe even some real builders! In that way… the students can enjoy the company of each other and no strict rules have to be enforced on us”, Craig said. Riley and Sheldon started to get on board with the idea of a hangout.

They were always bothered by how closed-off the school is and how rule-centered they are.

"Convinced yet?", Craig asked. "I do like the sound of that", Riley answered. Craig brightened up. Finally, after for an entire night! "What inspired you to start a hangout anyways?", Sheldon asked. "The former head-teacher of the school, Mr. Flax. He started a hangout himself—for archeologists. You two want to be archeologists and adventurers, right?", Craig explained. Riley and Sheldon begun to get pumped up by that. "Of course!", Sheldon answered, taking a happy glance at Riley.

"So, how can we help?", Riley asked. Craig clapped his palms. "Right! Sheldon, since you have good relations with the staff members, you can go and ask them for permission. Riley, you can help with the constructing. And I'll contact the people for constructing, since students of Class 4 are immensely strong, and I was once their classmate", Craig explained. Riley was convinced while Sheldon was suspicious on a small thing. "What if the officials say no?", Sheldon asked. Craig was sweating by that question. "Then we'll continue the project", Craig said. "Keep things under a black light". Sheldon and Riley were made to be concerned by that, but they agreed to that anyways.

"Convinced?", Craig asked. The boys smiled. "Yup!", the two said in sync. "Now, let's continue the project", Sheldon chuckled. Craig chuckled after that. *"Finally… my dreams… will come true!"*, Craig thought to himself.

Chapter 2

Little Bakers

The next morning, at school. It was cooking class—or baking class. The majority of the time, the students bake. It's only rarely the students actually cook something. Mr. Munz was the teacher. He was fat. Extremely fat. However, his fat also contributed to his height. He was the tallest teacher in the entire school! Because of that, the students fear him purely because of his height and fat! Everyone knows how strong sumo wrestlers are. Mr. Munz could especially be a sumo wrestler himself, but he devotes himself to food instead.

The Class 2 students were in the cooking room. Indeed, there was an entire room dedicated to cooking. They can't cook or bake in the classroom, can't they? Otherwise, a mess that resembles a food fight would constantly come by every time a cooking class ends!

The room was full of tables that formed a little corner for every student. Pairs were formed. The pair would always be the same pair formed in the classroom though. Since that is the case, Bruno and Alex were sitting right beside each other, watching Mr. Munz speaking about how good Thai food is. He was right beside Violet during his rambling session.

"Ah, yes. That fried rice… ohhhh was the fried rice amazing!", Mr. Munz said. The students were chuckling. "Boy am I jealous of you, Violet!", Mr. Munz said as he pinched Violet's cheek. She started giggling. "Oh, don't be! Going to Bangkok nearly every year is starting to wear out for me", Violet said. Mr. Munz was laughing. He had his

signature, scratchy laugh. “If I were you, then I wouldn’t have even gone back to New York! Over here is all… drab. Dirty. Thailand on the other hand… it’s super clean!”, Mr. Munz said, admiring the wonder of Thailand, until Violet diminishes that admire away. “Oh, no, no, no! Trust me. Thailand isn’t as clean as you think it is”, Violet countered. “Ok, can we start cooking now? Yeah, I know you’re proud of being Thai, Violet, but… err…”. Riley was at a loss of words at that point. He didn’t want to hurt his dearest friend’s feelings. Despite that thought, Violet smiled wide at Riley. “It’s fine. I’ll stop”, Violet assured.

Mr. Munz cleared his crusty throat. “Putting that side, let’s start cooking!”, Mr. Munz announced. “But wait! What shall we cook today?”, Mr. Munz asked to his students. They were guessing, as they always were in Munz’s cooking classes. There were many guesses, and most weren’t even those of desserts!

“Steak”, Brian named.

“Spaghetti!”, Bella answered.

“Pizza”, Maverick’s mouth watered.

“Omelette”, Casper stuttered.

“Soup”, Spencer answered.

“Lasagna!”, Winnie said.

“Cheesecake”, Sid suggested.

“You’re kind of right, Sid!”, Mr. Munz laughed. “It’s nothing really. Just make a cake of your own. Go crazy! Maybe even make a cake of your own culture”, Mr. Munz added. The students squealed in excitement. “Violet, I know you can bake out an amazing cake from Thailand!”, Mr. Munz encouraged Violet. Violet chuckled, but didn’t say anything, only getting out her supplies.

"You could be like that one guy from Class 4. That guy was obsessed with purple things and money, but he was a great baker!", Mr Munz said. The students were utterly confused, but at the same time, couldn't care much since they were so focused on their cake. Only one guy cared. It was Vlad. "Obsessed with money and purple things, huh? What letter did his name start with?", Vlad asked. "A. His name is like a flower…", Mr. Munz answered. Vlad snapped his fingers. Paul's head was lightened up. "It must be…", Paul paused. "Aster!", the two answered. Mr. Munz lightened up as well.

"Yes! Aster! He bakes up this cake. Ube roll, I think. It was delicious!", Mr. Munz said. "Yeah. He loves that dessert. It's from the Philippines, you know?", Vlad said. Mr. Munz gasped. "Is he Filipino?", Mr. Munz asked. Vlad shrugged and continued baking. "Anywho, continue your baking!", Mr. Munz said. Paul looked at Vlad, who was literally his partner. "Don't you know the truth already? Why didn't you tell him?", Paul asked. Vlad didn't want to answer Paul though, only giving him straight faces. Vlad was lucky he wasn't even punched by Paul.

The students were frantically baking, instead of calmly doing so. This is possibly because of how much time Mr. Munz took, rambling on about Thailand, which was a lot of time. Many students were baking chocolate cakes, others shortcakes. Some of them even made cupcakes and pancakes, since they technically are cakes. They do have "cakes" in their names.

Bruno and Alex were getting the batter into the oven. They were actually working on the same cake, which was a sweet sponge cake. Alex loves sponge cakes because of how soft they are. Bruno preferred normal cakes, but he supported his new friend so much that he decided to make a sponge cake with him anyways.

“You know, Bruno. If my old friends were still here, they’d make their own cake!”, Alex smiled. Bruno chuckled and blushed. “Oh gee. I’m just loyal that way!”, Bruno said. Bruno looked around the table and found blueberry lollipops. Two in fact. “Loll… LOLLIPOPS!”, Bruno exclaimed. He took the sweets away from the original place, which was in a cup, and put one of those lollipops straight into his mouth. “Mmmm… Lollipops…”, Bruno said. Alex wanted to look away until Bruno offered him the other lollipop without saying a word. “Er—no thanks”, Alex declined. “Ah! You can give the lollipop to Sid. He loves lollipops. He always sucks on them during class. That’s one of the few things that stimulate him!”, Alex suggested. Bruno forcefully took his lollipop out to say something. “What else stimulates him?”, Bruno asked. Alex shrugged. “Probably eating”, Alex said. “Just give him the lollipop!”, Alex continued. Bruno looked at the lollipop, then got out of the station, sucking on his own lollipop while walking. As soon as he did so, the oven rang and the cake got out. Alex smelled it, but was hesitant to take it out since Bruno was gone.

Meanwhile, Craig and Sid were waiting for the cake to bake. Craig was whistling out a tune while Sid was looking for food to eat. There were lollipop packets, but no actual lollipops. He sighed out loud. “Nothing to suck on, eh?”, Craig asked. “Uh-uh”, Sid answered. “Sucks to be you. Get it?”, Craig chuckled. Right after saying that, he remembered his plans. He was wondering how he could execute it since he was such an anxious guy.

Suddenly, Bruno came. “Hey guys! Any of you want a lollipop?”, Bruno asked. Sid’s eyes glimmered like shooting stars. “I do!”, Sid exclaimed. He ran up to Bruno, pushing Craig aside along the way and bit into the lollipop when it was still in Bruno’s hand. He took the stick and continued sucking and licking on it. “Wow. Can’t believe I learned

that part of Sid just now", Bruno whispered to himself. "What?", Sid asked. "Nothing!", Bruno responded. Craig glanced at Bruno, then looked away instantly.

"Say, Craig. Riley told me you got plans for something. Sheldon too.", Bruno said. Craig looked back to Bruno in surprise. "Really?", Craig asked. Sid looked behind Bruno and found Alex, panicking over the cake. "Uh, Bruno. I think your friend needs you", Sid said. Bruno turned back and saw what was going on. Alex kept giving Bruno hand signals to come. "I'm coming!", Bruno ran instantly. Craig and Sid were giggling, and began to focus on their own cake.

"So, how many strawberries do we need?", Craig asked. Sid counted on his fingers but just couldn't. "Erk. 5… I think", Sid sweated. Craig chuckled. "That means 7", Craig said. Craig took out 7 out of the 10 strawberries in the cabinet while Sid took out the batter out of the oven and formed a cake out of it. It had a normal cake shape. Sid took all the strawberries and formed a circle. "I need some frosting and some sprinkles", Sid said. Craig looked down, trying to find the frostings and sprinkles until he found them. Apparently, they were hidden in the most underneath cabinet.

Sid started to decorate once he got the things he needed. He topped the cake with the frosting, then spread out frosting all over the flat parts of the top of the cake, only leaving the edges as normal. Then he decorated the bottom with the same frosting. "I need… pink frosting", Sid said. Craig brought the pink frosting. "You can do anything you want with the pink frosting in here", Sid said while pointing at the empty part of the cake that hasn't been decorated with frosting yet. Craig puts in swirly, heart and star designs on the area, making a nice pattern around the cake when spinning. Everyone was secretly watching the two decorate in the background, some even too

distracted to finish their own cake. When the duo were done with arranging the strawberries, everyone would've been done with their cake. Either way, Mr. Munz was clapping for them.

"Wow! Congratulations, Craig and Sid!", he congratulated. The two were blushing. "Oh shucks! You should thank Sid! He's a master baker, despite his… empty brain", Craig said. Everyone giggled. "That's true!", someone said. "Now, the most important part: Taste testing!", Mr. Munz laughed.

Mr. Munz bended down to face the cake. He smelt it. It was a strawberry scent, as expected. It was a strawberry cheesecake after all.

Then Mr. Munz touched the cake with his finger, incidentally dipping into the frosting. He put his finger into his mouth, tasting the frosting. It was amazing! He continued to bend down.

Munz pulled out his trusty spoon from his pocket. He dug the spoon into a piece of the cake and tasted it.

Mr. Munz jumped from how tasty it was, nearly toppling down everything! "WHAT A CAKE!!!!", he screamed. He took the entire cake baseline and began to eat it like crazy, making his entire face a cake mess! Everyone was just watching in fear of watching this grown man who's a teacher downing into a cake made by his students. "Er! Excuse me!", Mr. Munz chuckled. He put down the remains of the cake and the baseline into the table. There was thankfully and oddly enough to feed 24 children. "If you couldn't tell, I rate this cake a 10/10!", Mr. Munz clapped. Everyone else clapped—except for the jealous Karly. Then everyone grouped up right beside the cake and kept asking Craig to cut the cake and give it to them.

“Say, Sid boy. How did you learn how to cook and bake?”, Mr. Munz asked. Sid snickered. “My mama and papa taught me how. They’re both bakers. We have a bakery!”, Sid answered. Mr. Munz gave an interested look on his face. “Is that so? What’s the name?”, Mr. Munz asked. “Breadcrumb Bakery”, Sid answered. Mr. Munz smiled wide. “I think I’ll take a visit there! It depends on my tummy”, Mr. Munz said. “You know, Sid’s only skill is baking”, Sarah said as a second-handed comment. “Shush it!”, Mr. Munz yelled. Sarah didn’t care and just waddled back to her seat after taking the cake. “I want to be a chef or baker someday…”, Sid said. “I know you’ll accomplish your dreams!”, Mr. Munz encouraged.

Once the students got back to their places and started eating. Mr. Munz took a walk through around the room, trying his best to not let his appetite take the best of him. Bruno and Alex were just sitting on their places, appreciating the cake that one of their fellow classmates baked. “Good job! I appreciate the hard work”, Mr. Munz said after tasting the duo’s cake. They didn’t respond when Mr. Munz left their area.

Right after Mr. Munz left, Vlad walked up to Bruno, who was siding on the side while Alex was beside the wall. “Hey Bruno”, Vlad said. Bruno sighed. “Hey Vlad”, Bruno said, looking away from Vlad. Vlad smelled the cake. “What is this supposed to be?”, Vlad asked. “Strawberry sponge cake”, Alex responded. Vlad’s eyes sparkled wide once he saw the strawberries lined up on top of the cake.

“I wanna taste it!”, Vlad said. Alex sliced a part of the cake and gave the slice to Alex. “There you go”, Alex said. Vlad licked his lips and bit right onto the cake. Vlad was on top of the world once he ate it. “STRAWBERRY!”, he yelled. Everyone stared at Vlad with odd eyes.

“I LOVE STRAWBERRIESSS!”, Vlad continued yelling. It seems like his appetite grew to that of Munz’s!

“Man. He’s going bananas for strawberries”, Bruno joked. Alex punched Bruno right on the shoulder. “Enough with the jokes”, Alex said. Vlad slid himself down to the table with the plate pouring down to the sink. “Ahhh”, Vlad refreshed himself. “You know, I take everything back. You know, those things I did yesterday, Bruno?”, Vlad said. Bruno was stunned at that point. “What? All because of strawberries?”, Bruno asked. “Vlad loves strawberries. Maybe a little too much”, Paul sighed at a distance. Vlad pulled Bruno’s hand and was kissing it. “THANK YOU!”, Vlad yelled again. Vlad ran away afterward. “Typical”, Alex said as rolled his eyes. “But I’m glad we didn’t make a banana cake… because Roselynn will eat the entire cake if we do!”, Alex added. Bruno widened and twitched his eye even more. “How obsessed with fruits is this class?!”, Bruno exclaimed.

Chapter 3

That Drama

Bruno and Alex were walking around the field during break, just watching the students mess around and play around the area. Suddenly, the two heard the school bell ring in the mere distance. Bruno panicked instantly while Alex was oddly calm. Bruno was about to walk back to the floor until…

"Bruno, don't worry, it's just the other grade", Alex said. Bruno realized and led out a sigh of relief. "Oh. This reminds me. I have to meet up with my brother now", Alex said. Bruno walked back to Alex and made out a confused, tilted look. "Your brother's in Grade 7?", Bruno asked. "You forgot already, didn't you?", Alex asked. "Well. He is in Grade 7. His name is August before you ask", Alex added. "Now, got to go. Bye", Alex said. He walked away with Bruno without him saying a word.

Bruno looked around the hallway with no destination in sight. He suddenly saw the flood of students coming his way. Bruno held onto the staircase's bars. He then saw Riley and Violet walking downstairs, laughing. Bruno looked up just to see them once the children got away.

"You know, Riley. Sometimes, I feel like we could be something more than what we are now!", Violet said. What Violet said was ominous on Bruno's side. Bruno continued to hide to not interrupt Riley and Violet's conversation on the top stairs. They were sitting on the stairs while they were talking about stuff. "Well, I already will be someone once Craig finishes that project", Riley said. Violet got to be curious by that. "What project?", Violet asked. "Ah, Craig's going to

start a project, but really, I doubt that'll ever happen! You know how ambitious Craig is", Riley said. Violet nodded, still confused. Bruno was as confused as Violet, but he believed Riley was right. This unknown project will never be done in Bruno's eyes.

Violet started blushing when she saw Riley's stunning eyes. She was astonished by Riley's bandana and fierce hair. Riley noticed Violet turning sunset red. "Are you ok?", Riley asked. Violet nodded to that question of concern. Bruno noticed the blushing and came to the conclusion that Violet developed a little thing for Riley. *"Knew they were more than friends"*, Bruno thought to himself.

Bruno was getting up to do something, that's when we tripped on a puddle of water, letting Riley and Violet notice him. "Bruno?!", Violet yelled. She ran down carefully, avoiding the puddle. Riley soon followed. Bruno got up just to see the two standing front of him. "Wah! Uh!", Bruno exclaimed. Bruno kept pushing his iris around the room. Luckily, the passersby ignored them. If they did, then the situation would truly escalate.

"What's the matter?", Riley asked, helping Bruno up from the floor. Bruno was at a loss for words, for he was caught by the two while spying on them. In an impulse, Bruno suddenly said from his mind, "You two are in love!". Violet and Riley were quite shocked by that sudden talk from Bruno. "In love?", Riley asked while blushing. She was shivering, then fell into Riley's arms. "We're just friends!", Riley said. While on Riley's arms, Violet shocked herself by hearing that, but she already knew that Riley didn't think more of her than a friend. "Yeah, sure. Then explain all those times you were cuddling each other", Bruno said. "Since when did we cuddle each other?", Riley asked. Riley and Bruno's heads were clashing with each other. "Since yesterday!", Bruno countered. Violet was in the background, looking to be scared. The two were about to pull punches until Craig

comes. “Hey, Riley. Can we talk for a moment?”, Craig asked. Riley looked, backing away from Bruno. “Sure”, Riley answered. Before he went, he glared at Bruno. Violet followed Riley, like she always does.

Bruno’s previously angered eyes turned regretful over time. He realized that he hurt the feelings of his previous classmate. That classmate was shy and sweet. Her and him used to get along a lot. Strangely enough, Bruno also remembered how close she and Nadia were. He started wondering what happened between them. Unfortunately, he couldn’t ask her in the moment. It was too late to, since she went off with her new friend. Bruno stepped up to watch Alex waving goodbye to his brother, who didn’t look anything like Alex, strangely enough. Alex approached a disappointed Bruno. “Oh, hey Bruno. Waiting for me, huh?”, Alex asked. Bruno smiled and nodding, ignoring what just happened to him. The two walked down to their floor until Bruno got tackled by a student.

“Ah!”, Bruno exclaimed. “What did you say to my friend!?”, the boy asked. Bruno opened his eyes and saw that it’s a student he never met before. He assumed it’s a student. It’s a boy who looked similar to Riley. Wearing the bandana and the gloves. “Your friend?”, Bruno asked. “Ok, who are you?”, Bruno added. The boy got up with his arms right beside his hips. “I’m Ryder. I’m friends with your classmate, Riley”, Ryder said. “I’m surprised you didn’t know him yet”, Alex said in the background. “Look, I just came to this school”, Bruno said, propping himself up. “And about what I said about Riley? Look, it was just a second-handed comment from me”, Bruno continued. Ryder gave him the suspicious look, but let him off scot-free afterward. Bruno led out a deep sigh of relief.

“What was that for?”, Alex asked, approaching Bruno who was cleaning himself up. “You see: While you were talking to your brother… I… er… I said that Riley and Violet are in love”, Bruno

admitted. Alex blinked, then laughed hysterically at whatever Bruno said. “Really? You’re sure you’re not joking?”, Alex laughed. Bruno twitched and said, “I’m not kidding, I swear!”. Bruno started shaking Alex’s body around, later letting him go. “Fine, fine. I shouldn’t expect much from teenagers anyways”, Alex said. Bruno rolled his eyes away. The two continued their endeavors.

Meanwhile, Craig was talking with Riley. Violet strangely wasn’t there. She was actually hanging out with her friends, Nadia and Bella. Sheldon was alongside the boys too. They stopped at a corner right beside Class 1 and beside one of the entrance/exit doors.

“So, are you two ready to initiate the project?”, Craig asked. Riley and Sheldon nodded. “I think I’ll ask the teachers now”, Sheldon said. Sheldon walked away. “I’ll also plan out for the construction”, Riley said. Craig nodded. “And get as creative as you can get! You can ask our classmates for that”, Craig said. Riley made out a thumbs up as he walked to class.

Craig was looking around the hallway as he walked through it. “Maybe someone else can provide some help…”, Craig said to himself. Suddenly, he got pushed to the wall by someone. “Agh!”, Craig groaned. He was right next to the wall, fallen down, only laying by his feet. He got up, then saw three boys and one girl, standing on front of him. Craig instantly recognized all of them.

“Team Toxic?!”, Craig exclaimed. They were all beside the door of the bathroom. “Yep”, they all smiled. Aster was in front of Craig, while the others were behind him. Aster was close to choking Craig, but luckily didn’t. “Heh, and you think we can’t mess around?”, Aster asked. “Since when did I say that?”, Craig asked. “Since the day you

first met Kyanide", Aster said. Craig looked at who could Kyanide be. "Who's Kyanide?", Craig asked. The team had a snide smile afterward. "Then allow us to introduce ourselves", Mercury said.

"As slothful as sin, It's Kyanide!

As greedy as a crab, it's Aster.

As attractive as a butterfly, it's Blossom!!

As ill-tempered as a firing blaze, it's Mercury!

We're here to waste on this baren land,

To crush everyone on every brand.

On the inside and outside,

We're filled with all our pride.

We're warning you like on packages,

So don't forget about our damages.

Get ready to get sick,

Because we're—"

Team Toxic got cut off by Craig, who was snoring away to sleep. "What's the meaning of this?!", Mercury yelled. Craig woke up as soon as he heard Mercury. "What?", Craig asked. Mercury facepalmed in disappointment while Craig looked around the area aimlessly. Craig got back to normal and was mad again.

"Get off me, you greedy money-hungry douchebag!", Craig yelled, trying to push Aster's arms away from his chest. "I'll get off if you give me your lunch money", Aster said. Craig widened his eyes off. "I won't. I know your tricks. You weren't even like this before, weren't you, Aster?", Craig asked. Aster froze, later getting sweaty when looking at

his friends. They were confused at that point. “Is that so?”, Mercury asked. Blossom squealed and hugged Aster suddenly on the neck. “Yup! He was an angel when I first met him”, Blossom said. Aster pushed Blossom away. “Shut up, Bloss”, Aster said. Blossom frowned immediately. “What happened to you, huh? Is it because of your parents turning into stuck-up criminals?”, Craig second-handedly asked. Aster sweated hard, but it washed away afterward. “Just give me the goddamn money!”, Aster said. Craig wasn’t intimidated at all. He didn’t even give in. Instead, he came up with a quick idea.

“Ok, then… If I give you my lunch money, will you promote the hangout to everyone in the school?”, Craig offered. The team was stunned by that. “The hangout?”, Blossom asked. “Craig’s going to plan a hangout, stupid!”, Kyanide said. “Ohhh!”, Blossom followed up. The team formed a circle, discussing something.

“Is this gonna be a good idea?”, Blossom asked. Aster had a smug smile on his face. “It is when it comes to money”, Aster said. Mercury nodded. “Aster’s not wrong. This offer will benefit us financially!”, Mercury said. Everyone finally agreed to a conclusion. This offer will go through.

“We gladly accept the offer”, Mercury declared. Craig greatly grinned his lips away. “Of course, this offer will go through if… the hangout gets accepted”, Craig said. The team didn’t care much about the condition. They just wanted the money. They returned back to their classes soon after this interaction.

“Well, it looks like some advertising is now set in stone for the hangout”, Craig said to himself. He got himself back to his own classroom. *“Meanwhile, I think I should focus on my studies”*, he thought to himself.

Chapter 4

I Dream

The school day was done. The sun said goodbye and night came by. That means the students were already getting back home, hopefully safe and sound. At least, the students who were present in extracellular programs. Almost everyone was forced in participating in them, though. Someday, by the next month, the students are thankfully allowed to choose whether or not they should participate in them. That day's activity was arts and crafts. Everyone got out of it without a creative mind, not as expected from the school and not as wished. Not only that, but the students were also left tired.

Everyone waved to each other goodbye as they went through their own paths home with their parents. Unlike the majority of the children present, Craig went back home without his parents. This is because Craig's parents are off to work at the time. Craig's brother isn't even in the school at any point of time. So, Craig had no choice but to go on his own. This worked out for him, since this allows him to visit his old friends at Flax's hangout place after school. Practically, this set-up is a win-win for everyone involved.

It was sunset when the students were going back home, which means everyone can see the orange beauty in their once blue sky. Craig wasn't an exception. While he was paving his way through the forest, he saw the orange and yellow mixing up in the sky. Craig led out a deep breath of needed fresh air.

After a long trot through the darkening forest, Craig finally reached the hangout place. It looked like a wooden shack, but at the same time, there were construction fences and long poles that forms cubes and cuboids. Craig entered the shack, without any sweat or tear in him.

Once he did, he saw the lightful room that his friends, Quaver and Flax were in. It was decorated with mirrors, pillows, pictures, tables full of food and lots of shelves that contained books and other important items. There was even a TV!

“Hello, everyone” greeted Craig. Everyone looked at him and smiled. “Hello, hello, friend!”, Flax greeted with open arms. Craig looked at everyone playing UNO with a pile of blue cards. “Playing UNO without me, huh?”, Craig asked. Everyone chuckled awkwardly. One of the girls took away the cards. “We wanted you to play, but Carl here got impatient”, the girl said, hitting Carl’s shoulder for a bit. “Gee, you just took forever”, Carl responded. “I thought everyone got used to me coming late. I’ve got school after all”, Craig said while hanging his jacker onto the hanger that stands beside the front door. “And I’ve got a Math assignment that’s due today. One of my classmates brought the finished project right on time”, Craig added.

Craig soon approached the sitting crowd. Louise and Carl made space for Craig. Sunny begun to shuffle the cards and counted the number of cards everyone needs. “Wanna play, Dean?”, Sunny asked. Dean looked straight at Sunny. “No. I’ll prepare the food”, Dean answered. “Alright then!”, Sunny said. She distributed the cards. 5 per each person. While she was doing that, Dean walked to the kitchen and got the food ready for cooking.

It was a young boy's turn. He was wearing a sweet sailor's outfit with the signature sailor outfit. He also had buck teeth and little freckles bearing on him. "Golly, it's my turn already?", the boy blushed. The boy laid out his card. Craig followed by. When it was everyone else's turns, Craig took a look at the boy. "Say, Bob, what's been going on with your life? I haven't seen you ever since you traveled to the Bahamas", Craig asked. Bob had a sunshine smile on his face. "Things have been goin' great! I just miss you. Really miss you", Bob answered. Craig chuckled. "I miss you too. Lots have happened to me", Craig responded, looking closely at the card. Once it's his turn, he turned in his card.

Craig looked into the abyssal distance when everyone was turning in their cards. It's a mystery what Craig thinks about when he's in this trans-like state.

When it was Craig's turn, Louise yelled right into Craig's ear. "WAKE UP!". Craig's brain woke up instantly from Louise's voice! "Louise…", Craig groaned. "PUT IN YOUR GODDAMN CARD!!!", Louise yelled. "Shut up, you big mouth!", Quaver yelled. Louise frowned and looked away from Craig. Craig peacefully put in his card… then went back to that old state again! He was ignoring all that was going on.

"Are you serious, Sunny?!", a girl shouted. On the top of the stack was a Pull 4 Cards card. She was looking around her deck and found a Pull 4 Cards card of her own! "Ahahaha!", the girl laughed. She pulled it out and dramatically plotted it into the stack. "Goodnight, Dave!", the girl smiled. Dave was about to stomp, then looked at the girl's deck and realized that she didn't say uno! "Clover! You didn't say uno!", Dave laughed. Clover was confused, then looked right into her deck. "NO!", she panicked. She sighed instantly then took 2 cards per the rules. "You still need to get those 8 cards", Clover second-handedly said. Dave sighed and hesitantly took the 8 cards.

Bob plopped out his card. “Craig boy! Wake up!”, Bob shook Craig. “Sorry”, Craig apologized. He plotted his own card into the stack. Once Flax put in his own card, he looked into Craig’s glazing eyes and seemed concerned.

“Craig? What’s wrong?”, Flax asked. Craig shook himself up and saw Flax. “Huh? Nothing”, Craig answered. Everyone didn’t mind Craig by then. They continued the game until someone bursts out, saying “UNO!”. It was Clover who exclaimed it out loud, which marks her as the winner. “Man, I sure do love winning!”, Clover said. “Who doesn’t?”, Carl responded with a very unenthusiastic voice.

The card was set into the desk’s cabinet. Dean arrived with plates upon plates of ramen noodles. “Just in time!”, Dean exclaimed. Everyone’s mouths were watering. Before anyone knew it, everyone munched down into the noodles once the plates have been brought to them. While they were eating, Craig was thinking about the hangout. He never thought of telling his own friends though. He thought that they would be upset of him for “copying” Flax’s brilliant idea. Craig kept himself silent about the entire subject until it has to be brought up.

“Good cooking, Dean!”, Flax complimented. Dean blushed. “Thanks, Mr. Flax. I know it’s not typical of me to do the cooking here”, Dean chuckled. “You know, you might be better than Clover at this!”, Dave said. Clover was frustrated by that sentence. “Hey! I know you’re salty over what I did!”, Clover shouted. Dave brushed her off as if she’s nothing.

“Quaver, how was Class 3 today?”, Flax asked. Quaver thought about his already-formed opinion about them. “They’re adequate students. Class 1 is infinitely better than them though”, Quaver answered. Flax chuckled and shrugged about his opinion. “The best

student left the class. Her name is Marlyn. She's a prodigy at music! I only hoped she moved to Class 1, but she unfortunately got to Class 2", Quaver added. "It's not unfortunate! Who knows what the students of Class 2 could do? The last time I ever went to that class, everyone was committing well to their talents!", Flax said. Everyone stared at Flax, confused but not saying a word. Clearly, they were confused by Flax's wording. "Well, Craig is a member of Class 2 now…", Clover said.

Suddenly, Sheldon and Riley crashed into the shack with their muddy shoes. They weren't even careful enough to wear boots! "Craig!", Riley shouted. Craig looked at them, so did the others. Craig was ever so embarrassed by even seeing any one of his classmates in the hangout. "Guys…", Craig sighed. "Who are **they**?", Dean asked. "RILEY?! SHELDON!?", Louise yelled out. "Were you talking about Class 2? And who are these people?", Sheldon asked. Craig was at a lost for words and pretending he didn't know who everyone in the hangout is. "Don't know", Craig said. "Oh my! Louise, Mr. Quaver and… Mr. Flax?", Sheldon said in a confused tone. Riley started squealing. "And Dean Dikes!", Riley cheered. "You know who that tall, skinny guy is?", Sheldon asked. "Duh! Dean Dikes is the most famous meditator out there!", Riley said. Everyone stared at Dean. He wasn't usually seen as a meditative guy, so it is odd to everyone he knew in the hangout. Even his own son thinks that's weird of him!

"Erk. Stop talking about me, boy!", Dean yelled, pointing his hat at Riley. Riley was shivering in cowardly fear. "Woah, woah, woah! Calm down everyone", Sheldon assured. "What even brings you here?", Quaver asked. Sheldon inhaled and exhaled. "Me and Riley are here to say…", Sheldon paused. "We want to be archeologists!", the two said in sync. Everyone's eyes were utterly surprised. "You're

joking, right?", Dave asked. "Golly! It's not easy working as one!", Bob said. "Oh my gosh! We've been apprenticing for years!", Sunny added. Sheldon and Riley didn't care that much. They knew they could work hard for such a job. It was an extremely relevant job too, at least at the time. "So what? We can accomplish it!", Sheldon said. Flax stepped in front of everyone. "I'm afraid to say that you can't. You two are too young to even apprentice. Plus, you're still in school", Flax said. Sheldon and Riley sighed.

The clock crowed out loud, indicating that it's 7 PM. "I think you three should be going now! Don't wanna be sleepy during school, right?", Flax encouraged. The three agreed and walked right out of the door. It was raining when they left, so they got soaked. Craig sighed while they were walking, waiting for a cue to talk, but nobody gave it.

Craig looked into the starry skies and looked around the swamp alongside Sheldon and Riley. "Did I tell you that I want an be an archeologist, Craig?", Sheldon asked. Craig glanced at Sheldon. "I don't think you did. Neither Riley", Craig declined. Sheldon chuckled, Riley soon following the chuckling. The darkness truly invested the fear into the children's minds. However, they couldn't care less about the horror. They just wanted to traverse through the swamp.

"Say, boys, have you ever felt like… life is blocking you from accomplishing your dreams?", Craig suddenly asked. The duo looked at Craig, then thought about it. "I guess I don't", Sheldon answered. Craig smiled. "I don't either", Craig answered. "Oh! Have you told Quaver about the project?", Riley asked. Craig frowned after Riley asked so. "No", Craig answered. Riley sighed. "I guess I and Sheldon have to talk to the teachers then", Riley said.

"Riley, what even happened before I came? It looked like something happened", Craig said. Riley chuckled. "It's a long story.

Bruno knows what happened", Riley said. Craig didn't mind the answer, but it's not an answer he hoped. Nonetheless, they continued their path to Craig's house. It was a long way, so they had a lot of time to spend together. Craig was wondering why the two want to go with him, or perhaps they didn't know that Craig was getting back home. Because of that, Craig took another path that leads to the Central Park, which was the way he always took to go to school.

"Hey, Craig! You know what I always wonder about you?", Sheldon asked, tilting his head towards Craig's way. "What is it?", Craig asked. "What's your dream?", Sheldon asked. Craig turned his eyes down to the dirty ground. "My dream? Don't you already know it?", Craig asked. "No, silly!", Sheldon laughed. Craig was thinking it's blasphemy that Sheldon was thinking that all of this was a joke. "What I mean is… what's your end goal in life?", Sheldon asked. Craig truly realized what Sheldon meant. He was starting to think about it deeply.

Craig looked at Riley's eyes, then at Sheldon's shoes. "I… I don't know", Craig answered. Riley and Sheldon had faces of concern as soon as Craig said that. After some silence, the three finally reached Central Park. "Ah. Here we are. It looks like you two have to get back home!", Craig said. Riley pouted while Sheldon looked tired and grim. "Goodbye and goodnight", Riley said. Sheldon didn't say a word when he left for home. Craig led out a grin, then frowned again, thinking about the last conversation he just had with his classmates.

"Gee… I should really think my future…", Craig thought to himself. He walked away soon after, back to his swampy grounds.

Chapter 5

Approval

The next day was a time of hurry.

It was just the first period. No teacher came to Class 2, not even Mrs. Garcia. There was only the classroom full of students, talking about the most trivial of topics.

Craig crashed through the glitter-decorated door, almost knocking out the door knob. He plotted his bag on his chair, instead of under the table. He was looking for something, but couldn't find it.

He looked at Sid who was sitting right beside him, eating a cake bar. "Sid! Have you seen Sheldon or Riley anywhere?!", Craig asked, shaking Sid to get his attention. "Mhm. I saw the two of them… they were walking out of the classroom", Sid surprisingly answered.

Craig gasped then ran off from the classroom. Everyone was confused, but at the same time, didn't mind him much. This was normal behavior from him at that point.

Craig was running through the corridor in immediate rush. On his way, he saw the Team Toxic members advertising the hangout.

"Sleep a lot, eat a lot, dance a lot, have fun a lot in Craig's Ground!", the Team Toxic sang in sync. Craig took a brake as soon as he saw the Team Toxic members harmonizing. "What are you doing?!", Craig yelled. The Team Toxic members shut their mouths instantly, but in a maddening manner. "You just said we should advertise your place", Aster said. Craig sighed. "And you forgot about

everything else I said, right?", Craig asked. The Team Toxic members were absolutely confused. "What do you mean?", Kyanide asked. Craig instantly facepalmed, feeling disappointed at how terrible of a memory span each of the 7—5—members have.

"I said that you can promote my hangout once it gets approved, but it clearly hasn't been!", Craig yelled. The Team Toxic members were fairly frozen, losing all the words that they could ever say. "Well… I don't remember that", Vlad said. "It's because you weren't there when I made that proposal", Craig said. "Now, I should get to the teachers!", Craig continued. He ran past them. "What even happened?", Vlad asked afterward. "It's a long story", Aster lied.

Craig ran past (what seems to be) everyone in the grade.

Pump, pump, pump,

His heart sang out.

Click, click, tap,

His feet cried.

Murmurs from behind Craig were just background or white noises in his mind.

Craig's racing thoughts were as fast as his feet.

Craig climbed down the stairs—multiple stairs.

Those stairs led to the ground floor, which is where the main staff room is. Where the teachers are staying in the morning.

Craig slipped through the floor, but didn't fall. He held on tight to the stair bars, not for long, of course.

He saw the first and second graders stroll around the hall, as if it was a street for a neighborhood, or a plaza. Craig remembered he was once these children. Instantly, he tried his best to ignore them all.

Craig saw the door knob that'd lead him to the room. He raced to it and opened it.

When he entered, he saw the teachers, all gathered up next to Sheldon and Riley, who were talking to said teachers.

"Especially you homeroom teachers! Your students would greatly benefit from this change", Riley said. The teachers were looking at the two oddly, specifically the four homeroom teachers. "You all could even hang out there! I mean, would you say you like this tiny, cramped space called a room? I didn't think you would!", Sheldon added. Craig gasped at the idea of that, but not in a bad way. The teachers could provide some sort of order in the hangout.

"Not a bad idea… for me, at least", Mr. Mando said. The other teachers put their two cents on the proposal too. "Perhaps it is for the better", Mr. Barley said. Mrs. Delilah nodded and smiled greatly. "I agree!", Mrs. Delilah said. Mrs. Garcia was looking at Craig's eyes, who was standing there in the distance, then glanced back at Sheldon and Riley. "I'm pleasantly surprised, you know? I've never had students like you!", Mrs. Garcia said. Sheldon and Riley smiled, more than they have expected. "So, it's approved?", Sheldon asked. They turned their heads to the other teachers, who were sipping their coffee and tea. "Of course!", Mr. Munz said. "As long as you keep yourselves strong", Bruce added. "And you keep my son safe!", Spencer's dad said. "And my daughter!", Sarah's father yelled. Sheldon and Riley were close to tearing up. Craig was too, in the mere distance.

Suddenly, Quaver and Louise came into the room, instantly noticing Craig's presence. "Are you seriously starting a hangout?!", Quaver yelled at Craig. Everyone took their eyes to Quaver and Louise. They knew what Flax did when he left the school, so they knew that this would be big news to Quaver and Flax's past associates. Especially considering the fact that Craig came up with the idea. "Yes, I do", Craig gulped. Quaver smiled. "How nice", he said. "Really?", Craig asked. Sheldon realized something. "Wait a minute. Craig! What are you doing here?", Sheldon asked. "I was just… checking up on you and Riley", Craig answered with a sweaty bone. Mrs. Garcia looked around the room and noticed that the head of the school wasn't there—not even Kiara. "Craig, Riley, Sheldon. Come with me for a moment", Mrs. Garcia said. The three were anxious. With a tone like that, they assumed they actually did something wrong!

The called-out students and Mrs. Garcia were getting their way out of the door, in the corner of the hallway where nobody would notice them. "You're being serious about this, right?", Mrs. Garcia asked. "Of course we are. We're ambitious about this!", Riley answered. Mrs. Garcia held a face of shock. "But you haven't even gotten the permission of the head teacher, nor the guidance counsellor! Or even worse… Principal Spin…", Mrs. Garcia said, holding onto Craig's shoulder. Craig shoved her hand away from his shoulder, preparing himself to say something. "That's the thing. Teacher, you should tell at least Mrs. Kiara about it", Craig said.

Mrs. Garcia trembled right after hearing that. "Are you crazy?! Tell another teacher to tell her! Maybe like Mr. Adams?", Mrs. Garcia asked. Sheldon snapped his fingers at that idea. "Yeah! Everyone in this school loves Mr. Adams, even Mr. Gregory!", Sheldon said. "If he

tells the head council of the school… maybe they'll accept the idea!", Sheldon continued. Everyone brightened up. "I hope your plans succeed anyways", Mrs. Garcia wished. The boys smiled wide and posed like crazy. "I know we will succeed, Mrs. Garcia! Just you see!", Riley said.

The school bell rang.

"Oops! Looks like lesson start now! Follow me", Mrs. Garcia said.

The boys followed Mrs. Garcia.

"Wow. Can't believe they actually accepted the idea", Sheldon whispered. Riley had the same exact thought as Sheldon. Somehow, Mrs. Garcia heard what Sheldon said and started to talk about why. "You see, most of us have been… how can I say this? Burnt out", Mrs. Garcia answered. As expected, the students were surprised that Mrs. Garcia would even hear them. "Burnt out?", Sheldon asked. "Well, Mr. Mando does look burnt out", Riley chuckled. Mrs. Garcia spat out at once.

"He always looks burnt out, even when I met him when we were teenagers", Mrs. Garcia said. Sheldon and Riley started to remember the pictures he saw in the staff room. In the box. "Does that explain why there were pictures of you and Mando in the staff room?", Sheldon asked. "Oh! Yes! You remembered that", Mrs. Garcia giggled.

"You and Mr. Mando knew each other way back then?", Craig asked. Mrs. Garcia nodded, affirming the notion.

"You see…", Mrs. Garcia said.

"When I moved to New York with Mr. Jeffery, we were into motorbikes and met some people who were interested in them"

"One day, we were going to Wendy's to grab a bite. It was that day when I first met Mando—or Marcel", Mrs. Garcia said.

The children's eyes widened in shock.

"You mean… Mando isn't his real name?!", Riley exclaimed. "Yeah. Mando was just a nickname one of the gang members gave him. The name stuck to him, so he decided to rename himself as Mando", Mrs. Garcia said.

"Anyways! As I was saying: I met Mando, he was working in Wendy's. It was the first time I've been to that branch. He was a friendly worker at first. I went to that branch more since I moved to that area of Manhattan.

I saw him more. I got closer to him. We eventually became friends.

I started giving him rides on my motorbike. However, Mando didn't like Jeffery that much. I don't know why!", Mrs. Garcia said.

"Maybe Mr. Mando has a crush on you?", Sheldon asked.

Mrs. Garcia paused and thought of it. "He can't be…", Mrs. Garcia said to herself. "Is… that why he never got married? Maybe he thinks he has any chance with me…", Mrs. Garcia whispered to herself. "What?", Craig asked. Mrs. Garcia shook herself off. "Nevermind", Mrs. Garcia said.

"Well, I was Mando's emotional support girl. When he ran away from his family, I was the shoulder he cried on.

Months passed. Jeffery finally proposed to me, in front of Mr. Mando. We were adults at that point. Mando didn't look so happy when he proposed to me though… in fact, he didn't even come to our wedding. We had one last interaction before I applied for a job here at the school.

Coincidentally, I found him at this school! Burnt out as he once did when he worked in Wendy's.

I thought: Hey, he's been through a lot. Maybe I can help him get through this!

Look at him now…", Mrs. Garcia chuckled at the end.

They finally reached the classroom. Mrs. Garcia seemed to have brushed everything she said off.

"Right! Once the lesson ends, I'll tell Mr. Adams that he should have a talk with Mr. Gregory, Mrs. Kiara and Mr. Spin after school. Otherwise, you three can start with your project!", Mrs. Garcia said.

The boys grinned and walked into the classroom…

With the classroom being an utter mess!

"Oh boy… it's one of those days…", Mrs. Garcia sighed in denial.

The three boys beside her had an awkward smile, or at least Riley and Sheldon did. Craig only had his empty face.

The day went as normal, strangely enough.

Chapter 6

Announcement

The very next morning,

The tone had completely changed.

Craig's face was cheering up. He hopped along his way to the door to Class 2. He found his classmates, going through their usual shenanigans. After Bella ran after Winnie with a spoon, Craig raised his arms up into the air and yelled out.

"It's official! Craig's Ground has become an official hangout!", Craig cheered.

The students seemed to have been brighten up. "Woohoo!", they cheered. Sheldon and Riley grinned at each other. Craig approached them with a wide smile. "Sheldon, Riley, get to work now!", Craig said. "Of course!", Sheldon agreed.

"It's time to get this ground digging", Craig said.

Things were put into action for the rest of the day. Craig wrote a paper, with the help of designing from Nadia and Violet, and hung it up on the main bulletin board of the school.

"CRAIG'S GROUND: BE FREE TO DO WHATEVER YOU WANT TO DO WITHOUT SCHOOL'S AUTHORITY"

,the advertisement wrote.

Craig knew this advertisement would bring eyes into the project. That's the whole point of an advertisement, isn't it? Adding onto the

bulletin board advertisement was the already established Team Toxic advertisement. When looking at Team Toxic harmonizing about the place, he was considering letting Bruno advertise the place since he made a name for himself back in the old school. However, he kept the consideration to himself. He already knew from the start that Bruno would reject the offer after all. That's the type of person that he is.

During the advertisement was Riley letting his family members build up the hangout. Of course, everyone needs their help. At the end of the first day, Craig went up to his classmates on his way home and asked them to build the hangout with Riley's family. Most agreed, though others were reluctant of the idea or afraid of failing when building. Sheldon was socializing with the staff members during this time. He kept Mr. Gregory, Mrs. Kiara and Mr. Spin busy while the construction. Sheldon thought that maybe, if he gets closer to them, then they would accept of the idea. However, if it's too late and they didn't approve of the idea, then at least this would keep them oblivious from the hangout. It seems more like Sheldon is leaning on the latter idea though.

Everything was going as planned to Craig.

This news got so widespread to the entire school that the news entered the mind of a student. A student from a peculiar class. That class being Class 1; Class 2's rival class. The class has been known for being a "cool kids" class, full of kids that have incredible social skills. Even the nerdy student isn't too shy to speak up! Unlike Class 2 which is full of everybody who don't have names for themselves. One of the many students among the class is a boy named Drake. He reigns supreme as the pseudo-leader of the class. He makes up all the decisions for the class and works as a "spokesperson" for the class.

A day after the announcement of the hangout, Drake got furious. He almost lost his mind when he saw the news on the bulletin board! The news got to him through word of mouth among his classmates.

"What's the meaning of this?!", Drake yelled. "Oop! It's just something I heard someone from Class 2 say so!", a girl said. Drake's eyebrows were furious, as much as his mind was. "Who even told you that?", Drake asked. His collar was about to fall, but that didn't matter much. "Uhm. Bella, I think?", the girl said. "Bella, huh… she would've known about what I did last year!", Drake said. The girl was utterly confused. "What? Drake's Palace?", the girl asked. The girls surrounding Drake were laughing. "That thing was from Grade 7! 7!", a girl dressed in blue repeated. "So what? It still meant a lot to me", Drake replied.

Mrs. Delilah came through the door, letting the door open wide. "Students, stop the discussions please!", Mrs. Delilah requested. She walked to her table and sat on her seat. She looked through the piles of books with the list of student names beside her on the wall. The students didn't shut up, especially the girls. It's known that they never shut up in the class, even if a lecture is being held. The teacher was used to it at that point. What she wasn't used to was the maddened Drake, though.

"I'll get that Craig the next time I see him!", Drake announced. Nobody cared enough to hear it though… except for Mrs. Delilah. She looked at him, fairly concerned. "Come on, Drake. You only ran the hangout for a couple of months, and it has your name and palace on it!", a girl said. "It only lasted so short because some idiots raided the place", Drake responded. Mrs. Delilah approached Drake in an instant. She was in her signature angered pose. "What's with that language, Drake?", Mrs. Delilah asked. Drake was trembling, which isn't normal since he never trembles in fear. "Sorry", Drake hesitantly

apologized. He looked away from Mrs. Delilah. She got concerned, but then brushed it off. *"Maybe he's excited for the hangout... if he even heard of the news"*, Mrs. Delilah thought to herself. She walked away from Drake soon after.

"I'll get Craig and his stupid classmates…", Drake said to himself, with a sinister look on his face. The girls couldn't care less about that, since they didn't care about the Class 2 students as much.

During lunch, the Class 2 students were sitting in their respective lunch tables. Everyone was enjoying their food. Most of the food were from the school, but some of it were from the students. Sid was the one who had his own food. He even made some of those on his own! Craig tried some of Sid's food and, as anyone would expect from an unexpected cook prodigy like Sid, tasted amazing. There was a crowd next to Vlad's seat—a 6-person crowd. They were talking about their usual nonsense.

"Man. Vlad sure is popular", Bruno said to Alex, who was sitting beside him. "Of course he is. Out of everyone in Team Toxic, he's got the most friends!", Alex said. Bruno took a peek at Vlad, who was surrounded by his friends. It's odd since Mercury is said to be the leader of the team. Bruno looked at Alex again. He was eating again. "You know. I wonder how it'd be like if I join the team…", Bruno said. Alex looked at Bruno, not caring enough to respond to him. "Oh yeah. I forgot that Team Toxic is going to get a whole hall to themselves in that hangout of Craig's", Alex said. Bruno lit up. "Really? But how?", Bruno asked. Alex smiled, taking his head to Bruno. "Team Toxic advertised the hangout, because Craig sponsored them. So, they made a compromise not only for money, but to open a whole section for the team", Alex explained.

Bruno was excited about his decision of joining the team, but hesitant to at the same time due to Alex's persistent begging. Bruno didn't want to disappoint his new friend, and everyone else in the school to a certain extent. Everyone knew how terrible the Team Toxic members are in terms of human decency and everyone knows the reason why they're the way they are.

In another table, Craig was minding his own business, eating his and Sid's food. It was delicious. It was a chocolate cake. A slice was cut for Craig, placed in a delicate paper plate. In the middle of a bite, a hand smushed the cake into a pancake. Craig was furious, but not as much as anyone would be. It's possibly because of how much cake is left. Craig looked up at the roof, just to find the face of a boy. The boy being Drake.

"Why hello, Craig Jerry. Enjoying a slice of cake, eh?", Drake asked. Craig was expectedly furious of Drake's action. He knew the boy for a couple of years, but he never knew Drake would turn on him. "I am! Let me enjoy it", Craig said. "And enjoying your life as the younger child?", Drake suddenly asked, seemingly taunting Craig. Craig glared at Drake about that question. "Oh, that was just a rhetorical question! Of course you do!", Drake said, chuckling a bit. He then put his arm on Craig's shoulder. "And? It's not it's not like you're not a single child", Craig said, pushing away Drake's pale hand. "Besides, how did you know I have an **older** brother?", Craig added. "Candance told me", Drake said. Craig widened his eyes up.

"Candance?! You're friends with her now!?", Craig yelled. Suddenly, he held up his fork and lifted up, facing to Drake. Drake pushed the fork away, making an assurance gesture. "What's so wrong with Candance?", Drake asked. "You already know why! She's your classmate!", Craig said. "Oh, boo hoo. She's a part of Class 1. Man! I can't believe that those in Class 2 corrupted you that much!", Drake

taunted. Craig snarled. Sid noticed the fight as soon as Craig snarled, but he didn't want to be involved in it. "Why are you here?", Craig asked. Drake chuckled out loud. "It's because of that silly new hangout you came up with", Drake said. Craig opened his eyes, almost twitching it. He instantly raged up his fist, but not ready enough to punch Drake right in the head.

"It's not silly!", Craig answered. "Well, you at least stole an idea from me", Drake said. Craig tilts his head around and then shrugged to himself. "What idea?", Craig asked. Drake's hair lifted to the hair, quickly turned his away-from-Craig head towards Craig. "Don't you know? Drake's Palace?", Drake asked. Craig was brought to be even more confused. "Drake's Palace? Don't remember a place named that", Craig said.

"It's the hangout I made last year! But then it got destroyed… by your classmates!", Drake shouted. Craig rolled his eyes. "Well, I'm not a part of… whatever my classmates did", Craig responded. "How didn't you know about the hangout?", Drake asked. Drake jumped and then got out a sheet of paper. "Wait a second…", Drake halted. Drake looked through the paper, where information about the hangout was written in it. "What?! 29 students?! Including me!? So there's 28!", Drake yelled. "And that should be out of the 82", Craig said. Drake threw the paper into the ground and stomped right on it.

"I don't understand! It's made by me", Drake began tearing up. "Maybe it's because you were a new student", Craig said. "… or maybe it's because the name was your name and palace", Craig sarcastically added. Drake's hair fizzled up and got a bit "pinched" by what Craig said, even if he knew it was sarcastic. That might be for the better considering it's Drake. "So, you're mad at me for stealing an idea of a hangout from you? I didn't even know you made a hangout", Craig said. Drake was still frustrated. It must be a punch to the gut for him.

Firstly, his hangout was destroyed by Class 2 students, then a hangout similar to his was created by a former Class 4 student who moved to Class 2. “I’ll tell you what”, Craig sighed. “If you calm down, then I’ll let you manage a department for the hangout”, he promised. Drake eyes turned to sparkles in the sky. “Fine”, Drake said. Sid looked at the situation with his bare eyes, with some slight confusion. Drake hesitantly walked away, back to his table, back to his “girls”. Craig sighed, then noticed Sid behind him.

“Oh, Sid! Uhm…”, Craig stammered.

“That was nice!”, Sid laughed.

Craig laughed alongside Sid; in a lesser volume. Craig looked at the chocolate cake, then grinned right at Sid’s face. “May you cut up another slice for me?”, Craig asked. Sid curiously looked behind Craig, only to find the crushed-up chocolate cake. Sid giggled and nodded.

Chapter 7

Grand Opening

Many days passed. It was to be expected since this project was so huge.

Those days turned into weeks. Specifically, 2 weeks.

It was surprising how Bruno never heard anyone talk of the hangout. Well, he did but he never thought those talks were true. Bruno thought they were rumors spread across the whole grade instead of a genuine idea and project. Even when Alex told him of the project, Bruno didn't believe him at all.

During those times, bricks and stones were being placed on top of each other by some tough teens and family members. It took a lot of blood, sweat and tears, but the project finally got completed.

After an assembly on Monday,

The students all returned to their respective classes. In Class 2, something odd occurred though. "When doesn't something odd occur in that class?", anyone would've thought. But this is a bit different.

Craig stood up on the teacher's table, which was strangely placed in front of the whiteboard instead of on the right. He cleared his throat. "Everyone: I like to tell you that… After all of this time… Of organizing, building, decorating and cooperation with everyone standing on this very floor…

Craig's Ground has officially been opened!", Craig announced.

Everyone was cheering and joyfully flailing their arms. However, someone was missing in the class. Indeed, Bruno was absent. It meant he could never see his so-called lies come true. Alex looked worried after the cheering. Bruno would probably stay confused the next day in Alex's eyes.

The next day was a normal day until the end.

"Goodbye and stay safe!", Mr. Adams said. "Goodbye, Mr. Adams!", Winnie replied. Everyone walked back to their homes, as they should. The overfilled bags never bothered the students. Everyone took a different path though. Bruno was walking through his usual path, but everyone else diverted. He saw Vlad on the way to the path, then stopped him, running up to Vlad and shaking him. "Vlad! Do you know what's going on?!", Bruno asked. Vlad looked at Bruno, then chuckled. "Of course I do! Craig built a hangout", Vlad said. "He opened it yesterday", he added.

Once Bruno heard that, he thought he was going to fall into a black void. He felt like the world was going to spin before his very eyes. "You mean… THOSE RUMORS WERE TRUE?!", Bruno yelled. "You thought they were rumors?", Vlad asked, close to snickering. Bruno grunted his mouth. "Don't judge me! I just can't believe a student would start a heckin' hangout!", Bruno said. Vlad pulled Bruno by the shoulder, then shook up his already-messy hair. "Man! You sure are a funny one!", Vlad said. "Well, I think I'm inclined to show you the hangout. Your Alex friend isn't here after all", Vlad continued. Bruno wore a warm smile. They walked towards the hangout, which was huge!

Bruno looked at Vlad curiously, then at the hangout, even more curiously. The hangout was made up of bricks and a garden surrounded it. Ponds were created beside the garden too. It was an apple to Bruno's eyes. "Come on, what are you waiting for?", Vlad asked once he ran next to the front door. Bruno giggled and ran with Vlad to the hangout.

Vlad opened the door wide. It was a fair-sized door. Before Bruno could even come into the building, though, Vlad closed the door. Bruno opened it, in a pinching upset feeling. Bruno finally got to see the beautifully crafted interior.

It was just as great as the exterior. There was a circle in the middle of 5 pathways. The first pathway leads to Class 1, the second being Class 2, the third being a path to "grouped" rooms, the fourth being Class 3, the fifth being Class 4. Each path was gorgeous.

Class 1 had blue-painted walls with doodles from the students and tons of name brands planted on the walls. Class 2 was painted black with lights. The floor was white in Class 2's path. The floor was generally dark-brown across the entire building. Class 3 was pink, purple, blue and white with clouds painted all around the wall. Fake cherry blossoms were also planted beside the wall, so do plushies. Class 4 was the exact opposite of Class 3, which they generally are. Their wall was painted red with things alluding to violence and war. Fake weapons were on the walls; even guns were!

Bruno's eyes were stars. Vlad snickered and pats on Bruno's back. "Not a rumor anymore, eh?", Vlad taunted. "Oh, Vlad!", Bruno chuckled awkwardly. Then two kids ran over to Bruno, leading him into the air. "You shut up!", a girl yelled. "No, you!", a boy yelled back.

Vlad shook his head in disappointment and facepalmed. “Calm down, you two”, Vlad said.

The boy and girl were Aster and Blossom, who were angered and injured. “What even happened?”, Vlad asked. “He stole my milk and cookie!”, Blossom yelled, pointing at Aster. “Only because you’re lactose intolerant”, Aster answered back. “Woah, woah! Aster! It’s fine if she drinks milk. I mean, she chooses to drink milk! Come on”, Vlad said. Aster raised his eyebrows, then punched Vlad right in the guts… or somewhere else. “SHE’LL DIE!”, Aster shouted. Bruno squealed in the background. “No? I’ll just go to the bathroom for hours”, Blossom corrected. “Still!”, Aster answered. Vlad sighed, then looked at Bruno.

“Sorry for them. They’re cr-“. Vlad stopped as soon as he found an opportunity for something. “Wait. Bruno. Why don’t you solve their problem?”, Vlad asked. Bruno hopped up. “Why?!”, Bruno asked. “I’m a bit busy with Kyanide”, Vlad excused. He ran away. “I didn’t even say if I want to or not!”, Bruno shouted as Vlad ran away. Bruno took a deep sigh right after Vlad went to the distance. The boy then took a look at the fighting friends, who didn’t even want to look at each other’s faces at that point.

Bruno came in between the two. “Hey. Wanna play football?”, Bruno asked. “I don’t play football. My feet aren’t good enough for it”, Aster said. “What? No. I mean the football around here. You know, American Football”, Bruno said. “Ohhhh. Still”, Aster replied. Bruno sighed. Bruno then looked at Blossom, then back at Aster. “Oh! Maybe you two can give me a tour around here?”, Bruno asked. Aster and Blossom opened their eyes and looked right at Bruno’s face. “You’re crazy, right?”, Aster asked. “It’s only been a day since this place opened!”, Blossom added. “Still. I want you guys to tour me around! I know you’re better than Vlad”, Bruno said. Blossom and Aster looked at each other, then forcefully agreed to tour Bruno around the

hangout. “If you give me mo-“. Aster was stopped by Bruno’s sudden sentence. “No, I won’t give you money”, Bruno said. Aster stomped, yet continued to tour Bruno around with Blossom.

The three were beside the Class 1 pathway. “Here is Class 1 pathway”, Aster said. “You’re not really allowed to get into the class that you’re not in, unless you have a reason or you’re with someone from that class”, Blossom explained. The three looked around the main circle, then at Class 2. They approached Class 2’s pathway. “This is Class 2’s place. That’s your class, so you can go in it. Oh! And we can come in too”, Aster explained. They approached Class 3’s pathway. Blossom gulped hard. “Th-this is for my class, Class 3…”, Blossom stuttered. “What’s the matter?”, Bruno asked, looking worried. Blossom hid behind Aster once Bruno asked so. “She hates her class and classmates”, Aster explained. Bruno didn’t say a word, but was concerned for her. They continued their way to Class 4’s pathway. “This is for my class. I hate my class too”, Aster said.

Bruno was brought to be concerned by the two. What have the class done to them to cause them to feel… somewhat jaded? They then approached to the grouped pathway. “This is the grouped pathway. It’s for large friend groups like Team Toxic or the Gossip Girls”, Aster explained. “We’re members of Team Toxic, if you don’t know!”, Blossom said with pride. “Yup”, Aster affirmed. “It’s fine if you hate us. We expect that. In fact, we want you to hate us!”, Aster added.

Bruno smiled wide. “I don’t!”, Bruno said. Aster and Blossom were shell shocked, with their hands nearly flinging into the air. “Really?”, Blossom asked. “Despite all the things we did?”, Aster asked. Bruno hugged the two of them, almost tightly. “’Course I do! I mean, there must be a reason why you guys are the way you are!”, Bruno said. Aster pushed Bruno away from the two. “We…”, Aster

said, trying to sound intimidating. He immediately frowned afterward. He looked at Blossom, who looked as upset as he is, almost more than him. He shook his head away. “No! Th-there are no reasons why!”, Aster said. “Come on, Bloss! Let’s get to the Team Toxic room! This is the end of the tour!”, Aster declared. Vlad came in, confused as ever. “What tour?”, Vlad asked. Aster and Blossom squeaked, then ran away. “Uh… what was that about?”, Vlad asked. Bruno shrugged, ignoring what just happened.

“Well! We should be getting to Class 2’s room right now! It’s over there”, Vlad pointed at the neon sign writing “CLASS 2”. The two walked over there and saw all their classmates, sitting and enjoying their time. “Wow…”, Bruno said in awe. The room was decorated with pillows and had a giant TV screen. It was playing an anime episode. There was even a book shelf full of random stuff.

“Welcome to Class 2, or the Class of the Paranormal!”, a voice came out. It was apparently an automatic message coming from the door. “What the? Who made that!?”, Bruno exclaimed. “It was made by my cousin”, Riley said. “He’s good at tech!”, Riley added. Bruno’s jaw dropped from astonishment. “Your cousin… MADE THAT!?”, Bruno exclaimed. “HOW OLD IS HE!?”, Bruno asked, shaking Riley by the shoulder. He was chuckling. “19”, Riley answered. Bruno gasped even more. “Man, man, man, acting like a girl like always”, Maverick joked. Everyone was laughing. Bruno pouted.

“Well, Bruno, how’d you think of this place?”, Vlad asked. “Amazing!”, Bruno answered. Craig had a warm smile on his face. “That’s nice to hear from you, Bruno”, Craig said. Alex gasped as soon as he noticed Bruno’s presence. He ran fast to Bruno. “Bruno! I’m so sorry about not telling you about this place!”, Alex apologized. Bruno giggled. “It’s fine, Alex! Vlad told me”, Bruno said. “Vlad? I… I thought

you were a bully", Alex said. Vlad shook his head. "Not really anymore", Vlad said. "At least to your friend. You're still a nerd", Vlad added. Alex stared at Vlad in anger, then pulled Bruno to his place, which was on a beanbag beside the book shelf.

"Wanna play a game?", Alex asked. "What game?", Bruno asked. Alex pulled out sheets of paper. "You have a letter of the alphabet, then you write something that starts with the letter in these categories", Alex explained while pointing at the paper. The paper wrote "A: Place/Name/Animal/Food". "If we get the same answer for the same category, then we lose a point. If we don't have a name for a category, then one of us loses a point", Alex explained further. "Alright! Seems good!", Bruno accepted. They were playing. Alex wrote "A: Australia/August/Alligator/Avocado. Bruno wrote "A: Austin/Alex/Ant/Apple". The two chuckled. "Good job!", Alex complimented. "Thanks!", Bruno thanked.

While they were playing, Connor was laying down on the sofa, watching the anime playing. Connor looked at Craig, who was right beside him, then at a picture of Mr. Flax on the wall. "Uhm… Craig…", Connor said. Craig looked curiously at Connor. "What is it?", Craig asked. "Have you told Mr. Gregory about this hang out? I-I have a feeling that you didn't", Connor said. Craig was shocked, then remembered something. "No… I haven't…", Craig answered.

"I think you should, Craig", Connor recommended. Craig wasn't shocked or surprised of not telling Mr. Gregory, rather he seemed more shocked by how Connor was speaking. He was never like this to Craig, nor anyone. Only to Casper.

"I'll try to, Connor", Craig assured Connor. He looked away from him, stunned.

Chapter 8

Supposed Friends

The next day,

Mrs. Garcia was walking up on the floor and then took a seat. She looked around the class and found that the bulletin boards were empty. It is to be expected since the boards were recently installed into the classroom. “Students, why don’t you all fill out the board?”, Mrs. Garcia asked. The students looked up at the boards, since those were above them, and saw nothing but blankness. “Since when did we have bulletin boards?”, Renard asked. “Since yesterday”, Mrs. Garcia replied.

The students looked at each other, then at Mrs. Garcia. “If you want us to fill out the boards, then what should we fill it with?”, Riley asked. “Oh, I don’t know. Maybe something that happened in your life, or sharing your thoughts. Just fill the board out! All 24 of you! Even you, newbies!”, Mrs. Garcia. Paul rolled his eyes out. “Please stop calling us newbies, miss”, Vlad begged. Winnie snickered. Oddly enough, Paul wasn’t beside Vlad. This was because Paul was evidently absent that day.

“Come on, Jasmine! Let’s fill up the boards!”, Marlyn said to Jasmine. Marlyn flings Jasmine’s to her arm. “Hmm… but what?”, Marlyn wondered. Jasmine pulled out a drawing she made out of her bag. “Maybe this?”, Jasmine asked. Marlyn snapped her finger and snatched the paper out of Jasmine’s hand. “Yep! I think I’ll post this poster for a One Direction concert!”, Marlyn said. Jasmine grinned wide.

Marlyn pinned the two papers onto the right board (since it is the closest to them). Some of the girls posted on the board too. “Maybe I could post this…”, Alex said, pulling out a picture of… something. “A creeper? From that Minecraft game?”, Bruno asked. Alex nodded while Bruno took the paper and kept staring at it. “Why can’t you just post something about Pom Pom?”, Bruno asked. Alex smiled while getting back his paper. “What are you going to post, then?”, Alex asked back. Bruno chuckled. “I’m gonna post something about ɓuiʞɯɐɯ ɯ,I ʞooq sɹɥʇ”, Bruno said. Alex felt cooked up once he saw a book… a book named Extraordinary. “Wait. Isn’t this the Ym9vayB3ZSdyZSBwcm90YWdvbmlzdHMgb2Y/”, Alex asked.

Bruno ignored the question asked and plotted a page of the book into the bulletin board, pinned and all. Alex proceeded to apply his creepy face paper. “Why did you pin this anyways?”, Bruno asked. “Look, to tell the truth: I’m actually into-“. Alex got cut off by a man who came into the classroom.

“Who’s going home now?”, Mrs. Garcia asked to the approaching man. He held a paper that wrote a note. “Alex Wilson”, Mrs. Garcia read out. Instantly, Alex got up and packed his bags. “Farewell, everyone”, Alex said. He followed the man who gave Mrs. Garcia the note, which she also signed. Bruno sighed deeply. “Looks like I’ll never get the answer…”, Bruno said to himself.

Mrs. Garcia looked around the classroom, piecing up a puzzle. “Vlad, since your partner is absent, and since Bruno’s partner left early today… You two, why don’t you sit together for today?”, Mrs. Garcia asked. Bruno and Vlad were close to jumping out of their seats, but they didn’t. “Alright, teach”, Vlad said. “Don’t call me teach…”, Mrs. Garcia requested, staring right at Vlad’s heart. He squeaked, took his bag and ran to the empty seat beside Bruno.

“Today, we’ll discuss about something you kids might’ve not been taught before”, Mrs. Garcia said. “Admittedly, it’s not a part of your actual studies either! It’ll just be a normal discussion”, she added. The students were at the edge of the seats. No teacher had ever hyped up a discussion like Mrs. Garcia. “Let’s talk about: Love!”, Mrs. Garcia said. The students were amazed by the topic. “Now, can anyone please tell me some sort of poem about love? Or something like that”, Mrs. Garcia asked. Max raised his arm instantly. “Max, come on!”, Mrs. Garcia encouraged. Max stood up and cleared his throat. “This is not a poem, rather than a nursery rhyme”, Max said. “It’s alright, Max!”, Mrs. Garcia assured. Max smiled, then sang out,

“Skidamarink a-dink, a-dink
Skidamarink a-doo
I love you (I love you)
Skidamarink a-dink, a-dink
Skidamarink a-doo
I love you

I love you in the morning
And in the afternoon
I love you in the evening
And underneath the moon

Oh, skidamarink a-dink, a-dink
Skidamarink a-doo
I love you (I love you)

Skidamarink a-dink, a-dink
Skidamarink a-doo
I love you (I love you)
Skidamarink a-dink, a-dink
Skidamarink a-doo
I love you

I love you in the morning
And in the afternoon
I love you in the evening
And underneath the moon
Oh, skidamarink a-dink, a-dink
Skidamarink-a doo
I love you (I love you)".

"Aww! How cute!", Violet squealed. Everyone else wore a warm smile as Max sat down. "That was beautiful, Max!", Mrs. Garcia complimented. "Thank you, Mrs. Garcia. I greatly appreciate the compliment. I'll let you know that I found out about the nursery rhyme after my mom sang it to me after my father ran away from us. I have no clue why he left. I never got an answer as to why, but…", Max paused and looked around the class. Everyone was staring at him, making him look down at the ground and sweat. "Erk. I sincerely apologize for that", Max apologized. Mrs. Garcia chuckled. "It's fine!", Mrs. Garcia assured.

"Well, does anyone else have anything else to add?", Mrs. Garcia asked. Sheldon raised his arm. "Yes, Sheldon?", Mrs. Garcia asked. Sheldon didn't stand up, unlike Max. "Mrs. Garcia, are you talking about love because of that discussion we had, like, 2 weeks ago?", Sheldon asked. Mrs. Garcia approached the boy. "What discussion?", Mrs. Garcia asked. "You know what. The one about Mr. Mando", Sheldon said. "Yeah… have you asked him yet?", Riley asked. Mrs. Garcia started sweating, her dress almost moist. "Not that I didn't…", Mrs. Garcia said. "What discussion?", Roselynn asked. "Please ignore that, students!", Mrs. Garcia said. Nobody listened to that instruction, as expected for teenagers.

"Oooooh! Mrs. Garcia's got some love history!", Bella sung. Karly turned red, in front of the class. "Mom, was Mr. Mando really

gonna be my dad?", Karly asked. Mrs. Garcia turned extremely red as she turned to her daughter. "No way!", Mrs. Garcia denied. She grunted at Sheldon. "Why did you bring up that topic?", Mrs. Garcia gritted as she asked Sheldon. Sheldon shrugged, then chuckled a bit.

Meanwhile, Vlad turned to Bruno. "Aye, have you got a love life?", Vlad asked. Bruno turned as red as Mrs. Garcia. "What? Me? No", Bruno answered, then gulped. "You sure? You sure you're not in love with Blossom~", Vlad taunted. "I'm not in love with Blossom!", Bruno denied. "Then how about Jasmine?", Vlad asked. Bruno shut his mouth. He charged up right afterward then opened his mouth. "I'M NOT IN LOVE WITH JASMINE!", he yelled out loud! Everyone obviously noticed.

"Bruno? What's wrong with you?", Mrs. Garcia asked, turning to Bruno and Vlad. "Wah!", Bruno cried. "Ah, I should've known. It's because of Vlad", Mrs. Garcia blamed, putting her arms together. "What?! I did nothing!", Vlad shouted. The students were giggling. Bruno pulled himself away from his classmates and teacher. *"Only if Alex is here… but I bet he won't help either!"*, Bruno thought to himself.

"Apologize to him", Mrs. Garcia commanded Vlad. He sighed, then turned to Bruno. "Sorry", Vlad forcefully apologized. "It's fine", Bruno said, still looking away from Vlad. Vlad knew he couldn't do anything about Bruno's feelings, so he looked away and glanced back at the teacher. Mrs. Garcia walked away from the two and begun to write on the whiteboard. "Alright, let's continue this discussion!", Mrs. Garcia said in the blurry background.

It was the next period: PE.

Everyone was playing football (American), while the girls were gossiping and talking. Bruno didn't play that day. He simply didn't feel like him. The game was between the Class 2 and Class 4 students. Class 4 was currently winning. Bruno looked around the field, just to find the Team Toxic members sitting on the seats on the same row as Bruno's. He ignored them **at first**.

"I'll have you know, I had to sit with that Bruno guy for hours!", Vlad said. Bruno instantly noticed and started getting closer to the group, but not so close that the group would notice him as an eavesdropper.

"Really? That must be a pain in the ass", Aster said. "Hey! Stop using that language! Especially in front of Blossom", Mercury requested Aster. "So what? She hears me say the f word everyday", Aster replied. Mercury rolled his eyes. "You really think you're going to disrespect your leader like that, huh?", Mercury asked. Bruno sighed. "Aster, rude as usual". However, Bruno said that out loud, which means… yeah… everyone heard that.

"Well, well, well! Look who's here!", Kyanide laughed. Bruno gulped, shutting his mouth with his hands. "So you're the one who complained about Vlad in class, huh?", Aster asked, readying his fists. "No…? Mrs. Garcia—". Bruno was stopped by a punch. Fortunately, he dodged it. "Eek!", Bruno squeaked. He ran away out of the seats. The Team Toxic members started chasing him.

Bruno hid behind the bleachers and led out a hard gasp. He looked at the right, just to find Sarah and a boy kissing. His eye was twitching. Before he knew it, Sarah noticed Bruno. "Are you serious", Sarah sighed. The boy jumped. "Wah! Bruno?! What are you doing here!?", the boy yelled. "Nathaniel!", Bruno said. Indeed, it was the same boy from Bruno's bus—Blossom's enemy. "NATHANIELLLL!", Blossom yelled behind Bruno's back. Bruno squealed, then ran away

from Blossom, then bumped into the Team Toxic members. “Team Toxic!”, Sarah gulped. Nathaniel took Sarah’s hand as the two ran away from the situation. “Yeah, you better run!”, Blossom yelled.

Bruno was concerned up by the Team Toxic members at that point. He felt like he couldn’t escape whatsoever. Aster cracked up his neck and knuckles. “I know you’re asking for a fight. I’m hungry for one. It’s perfect, isn’t it?”, Aster asked. Bruno didn’t want to say a word. He was only whimpering like a stray puppy. “Aww! Cute little lost puppy here, eh?”, Kyanide joked. Everyone hysterically laughed while Bruno’s fearful face turned into rage. “バスであなたを見た瞬間から正しかった!”, Blossom laughed. Bruno just stared at Blossom. He got his fists ready to punch, but not before a familiar voice came.

“Kids? What’s going on here?”, a man asked. He wore a sports outfit, the one with lustrous uniform. The man also had a whistle, right on the neck, hung by a string. “Oh! Mr. Jeffery! It’s nothing”, Mercury lied. “We were nothing absolutely nothing”, Vlad lied. Bruno growled. “You were!”. Mr. Jeffery took note of what Bruno said, later glaring at the whole team. Of course, they were sweating and grinning awkwardly. “I’ll keep my eye… on you”, Mr. Jeffery threatened as he made a staring gesture. He soon walked away from the bleachers after hearing a horn blow from the main field.

The team led out a deep sigh of relief, then glaring at Bruno. “Don’t snitch on us like that again!”, Mercury yelled. Bruno couldn’t care less and glanced away from everyone. He was about to walk away until he got pulled by Aster by the shirt. “You’re not getting away scot free!”, Aster shouted into Bruno’s ears. Bruno started to squeal and squeak. “Leave me alone!”, Bruno begged. Aster didn’t even notice Bruno said that, instead proposing, “If you want us to leave you alone… let’s have a battle at the hangout, tomorrow”.

Bruno twitched his eyes, starting to tear up. “O-Ok…”, Bruno hesitantly agreed. He was eventually dropped down to the dirt-filled ground. Left alone on the dust, the Team Toxic members walked away from the defeated Bruno. Blossom, however, stayed in her place, staring at Bruno with a strangely sad face.

“Blossom?”, Vlad asked, stepping back to the bleachers. Blossom took her face over to Vlad’s. “Oh, right”, Blossom said with a straight, but soft face. She was about to walk over Vlad, before he stopped her. “What’s the matter?”, Vlad followed up with his question. Blossom frowned, then smiled softly at Vlad. “It’s no-“. Blossom got stopped by Vlad, who was glancing at Bruno, then at Blossom. “I know it’s about Bruno”. “I feel the same way, too”, Vlad assured. Blossom stared at Vlad’s eyes, then smiled again, walking away. Vlad didn’t though. He looked at Bruno on the floor for one last time. Bruno got up once Vlad was staring at him, making him run away back to the rest of the team. Bruno sighed out loud.

It was 3:30 PM. Nothing notable was occurring at that moment. Ms. Sylvia was only speaking in French and blathering on about the French Revolution for no significant reason. Bruno was only staring at the window across the room. It showed a view of Manhattan. Since the school was beside the city and Central Park, he got a fairly clear view of the main city, which was amazing.

Suddenly, Bruno got interrupted by Vlad. Vlad led out a slingshot with a rubber band and threw out a tampered paper ball. “Khe khe khe!”, Vlad laughed as Bruno turned his head to him. Bruno, being furious, took out the paper ball and threw it back at Vlad in the middle of his laughter. “You do know I’m much more powerful than I seem, right?”, Bruno asked. Vlad paused, then laughed more. “I don’t—and I don’t believe it!”, Vlad laughed. Bruno

growled, then smiled. “Fine, fine… I mean, it’s not like being the son of a police officer is really that powerful”, Bruno taunted. Vlad froze and realized the truth. The fact that Bruno was even the son of a member of the law is bad news for Vlad—more of so for his parents though. “NO WAY! YOU’RE NOT…”, Vlad stammered. Bruno took a palm into Vlad’s blabbering mouth and looked around the classroom. “Yes, it’s true. I’m the son of **the** Ryan Ray”, Bruno smiled.

Vlad started to tear up.

“Please, Bruno! Don’t tell your father that you’re friends with me!”, Vlad begged while crying. Bruno stayed still and stared at Vlad, not smiling anymore. “Wait, really?”, Bruno asked. “What’s the matter anyways?”, Bruno followed up. Vlad pushed himself towards Bruno’s body, then leaned towards his ear. “My father is a criminal!”, Vlad admitted. Bruno blinked for a moment while Vlad repelled himself away from Bruno. “So Alex was right… about the members of Team Toxic being the children of criminals…”, Bruno said to himself. “Alex? Seriously?”, Vlad grunted. Bruno sighed with an extremely unamused face.

Soon enough, Ms. Sylvia came up to the two. “What’s ze problem?”, Ms. Sylvia asked. Vlad was frozen on the spot. “It’s nothing”, Bruno lied. Ms. Sylvia hummed herself, then sadly walked away. “Well, students, I think it is time! Time to go ze home!”, Ms. Sylvia said.

Everyone packed their bags. While packing, Vlad remembered something. He remembered what happened in PE earlier that day. It was terrible for Bruno. Vlad looked at Bruno while Bruno was packing his bag, filling it up with anything he could see. Vlad sighed, then did the same for his bag.

Once everyone got up and walked out of class, Vlad subtly approached Bruno. “Hey, Bruno”, Vlad called. Bruno turned his head just to see Vlad by his side, which is odd since Vlad is always hanging about with his friends. “Oh, Vlad”, Bruno said. “Erm. I’m sorry”, Vlad apologized. “Sorry for what?”, Bruno asked. “For what happened in PE… I didn’t mean for that to happen…”, Vlad explained. Bruno smiled. “It’s fine! I know you can change”, Bruno smiled. Vlad smiled back with a warm one. Vlad looked away to find his friends. Without saying a word, Vlad walked to them while Bruno walked alone.

Chapter 9

More Than Classmates

Following the school day, everyone walked to the hangout as they usually would those days. Bruno was no exception. He walked up to his class's room and saw everyone lying down and watching a series on the TV. Of course, everyone was talking. That's to be expected in a relaxed hangout setting like that.

Bruno approached Max and Spencer, who were just watching the movie. "Hey boys! What show are you watching?", Bruno asked. Max and Spencer turned to Bruno with their straight faces. "We're watching iCarly", Spencer said. "I thought it'd be obvious judging by the editing!", Max added. Bruno chuckled while sweating. "Sid said that you love the show too", Spencer said. "I do. I'm surprised you even trusted Sid at all, though!", Bruno chuckled. Spencer shrugged. He and Max continued watching the show and laughed at a joke. Bruno laughed alongside them too.

Suddenly, Carly pulled Spencer out of the ground and spun with him. When they stopped, Carly said "We could be in the show, you know!". Spencer, feeling dizzy, just stared at Carly with a maddened face. "I know, and I don't care", Spencer responded. Sarah laughed while everyone else was just annoyed. Soon, Maverick and Mandy joined the laughing.

"Well, everyone, what do you think we should do?", Craig asked, getting up on a pillow. Everyone took their eyes to Craig. Putting their heads together, they came up with odd concepts.

“Pin the tail on a pony!”, Winnie exclaimed.

“Musical chair”, Violet suggested.

“Duck, duck, goose?”, Sheldon suggested with hesitation.

“Spin the bottle~”, Nadia said with a lovely tone.

“Red light, green light, 100%”, Max said.

“Why can’t we just dance?”, Marlyn asked.

“Mehehehe…”, Bella laughed maliciously. Everyone stared at her, worried. “Truth… OR DARE!”, Bella suggested with thunder in the background. Everyone gasped and took a step away from Bella. “NO! NOT TRUTH OR DARE!”, Jasmine cried while yelling. Craig sighed. “I hate to say this, but since Bella said so… let’s play Truth or Dare”, Craig sighed. Bella jumped up in the air, cheering while everyone gritted their teeth in anxiety.

As they closed the TV, everyone sat in the silent light of the room. “Heh…”, Bella chuckled. “I’m gonna ask”, Bella declared. Everyone gulped while sweating. Bella put their finger around the room, where everyone was sitting on their seats.

“Sheldon!”, Bella called out. Sheldon dropped his throat. “Dare!”, Sheldon said. Bella grinned maliciously. Sheldon wanted to fling himself away from her, but he couldn’t. “I dare you to… do 30 pushups!”, Bella said. Sheldon dropped his chest, then laughed. “Man! 30? Al-“. “Oops, I stuttered there. 50!”, Bella laughed. Sheldon jaws dropped, then stomped on the ground. “Fine!”, Sheldon yelled. He got to the middle of the room, then did 50 pushups. While he was doing so, everyone was counting in a chanting tone. “…48! …49! …50!”, everyone yelled, then cheered. Sheldon flopped to the ground, entirely red. Bella clapped. “Good”, Bella said. “Nadia, it’s your turn to

ask", Bella continued. Nadia sighed. "Bella, why don't you always ask? If all of us asks, then the game will take forever. It's a Wednesday, so…", Nadia said. Bella blinked. "Alright", Bella said.

Bella looked around the room. She pointed her finger on Bruno. "Bruno!", Bella called out. "Alright. Er. Truth", Bruno stammered. Bella took a moment for herself. "Hmm…", she hummed. She grinned. "Tell me the most embarrassing memory you ever had", Bella said. Bruno gulped, then sighed. "Well… I did wear my pajamas once to school back then…", Bruno admitted. "They sent me back home because of that!", he continued. The students of the Brooklyn branched began to laugh. "Oh man! I sure do remember that!", Maverick laughed. Bruno blushed in red. Bella giggled too. "Look, I was sleepy, ok? It's only when Pacha told me about it, I knew about it!", Bruno said in embarrassment.

Bella took a look around again, since that round was over. She pointed her singer at Max. "Mehehe!", Bella laughed. "Truth or dare?", Bella asked. "Truth", Max responded. Bella smiled, then slammed her palms on the table in front of her. "Tell me: What are you, Max?", Bella asked. Max stared at her blankly. "I'm a human", Max answered. Bella shook him around by the shoulder once she approached him. "Tell me the TRUTH!", Bella yelled. Max slammed her on the shoulder. "I'm a human, I swear!", Max said. Bella growled, then Spencer pushed her away. "Leave him be", Spencer said. Bella crossed her arms. "Hmph. Fine. I'll take that as an answer", Bella said. "*I **still** don't believe he's a human though*", she thought to herself. She walked back to her position, then breathed in and out.

Bella instantly pointed at Maverick. "Maverick! Truth… or dare?", Bella asked. Maverick grinned. "Dare", Maverick said. "Heh. A daredevil, just like always", Bella responded. She cleared her throat and tried to remember her dare for him. She snapped her fingers once

she did. “I dare you to… run to Class 1’s room and yell out, “Class 1 drools, Class 2 rules”. Maverick laughed and got up. “Alright!”, he agreed. Everyone led out an, “ooooh!” in unison. Maverick walked out of the room, took his way through the main hall and into Class 1’s path, which strangely didn’t have a guard at that time. He creaked the door open, then yelled out, “CLASS 1 DROOLS! CLASS 2 RULES!”. Everyone in Class 1 stared at him, then he noticed that Vlad was there. Maverick gasped instantly. “Vlad?! That’s where you’ve been!?”, Maverick exclaimed. A boy jumped on Maverick, nearly scratching him on the forehead, but not before Maverick pulled the boy’s arm away from him, rushing him out of the Class 1 pathway. “Yeah, you better run!”, another boy yelled. When Maverick came back to the Class 2 room, everyone cheered and clapped. Maverick led out a deep sigh of relief. “I survived…”, he said to himself.

After a few rounds, it got down to Riley. “Riley! It’s finally your turn. Truth or dare?”, Bella asked. Riley sighed. “Dare…”, he hesitantly answered. “I dare you to kiss Violet!”, Bella said. Riley gasped, wanting to stomp. He didn’t though. Riley got up and approached Violet. Puckering his lips, he leaned down to Violet. He closed his eyes slowly. Before he knew it, Violet pulled Riley towards her and kissed him right on the lip! Riley’s eye was wide open while Violet’s was closed. “V-Violet!”, he stuttered after getting away from Violet’s lips. He fell in the process. “Oooohhh!”, everyone squealed in unison. “Riley, Violet, sitting on a tree! K-I-S-S-I-N-G!”, Winnie sung and taunted. “Stop it, Winnie!”, Riley yelled. Violet covered herself with her long hair after Winnie sung. Riley wanted to say something, but shut his mouth instead. “*So, I was right that day*”, Bruno said to himself.

“Looks like the game is done!”, Bella announced. “Now it’s our turn to ask you!”, Mandy hissed. Bella jumped and bit her mouth. Marlyn saved the moment though. “Hey! Why don’t we dance?”,

Marlyn asked. Craig nodded gladly. “Yeah, we totally can. Having a dance sure will give us some positive energy, won’t it?”, Craig said. Everyone nodded. “Then let’s party!”, Marlyn cheered.

The middle of the room had turned into a dance floor. There was a radio right beside the dance floor, with tons of speakers beside it. Music was playing in it. Everything got groovy on the floor. It’s a surprise that none of the other classes even noticed the noise the class was making, but that was probably because the main room was lodged at the end of the pathway. It’s as if the room was a house and the pathway was just a path to a remote house. Sort of like Craig’s house. It works the same way for all the other class’s rooms.

The groovy music turned into sappy, pop music. This was of Marlyn’s doing. She was playing a One Direction song, specifically “Live While We’re Young”. “This is the latest hit, y’know!”, Marlyn said. Everyone sighed deeply, except for Jasmine. “Yay!”, she cheered. Everyone hesitantly danced along to that song, but gave up half-way, sitting their usual seats.

While the girls were dancing, Bruno noticed Vlad in the darkness. It was odd since Vlad wasn’t there since he stepped foot into the room. As soon as Bruno noticed and approached Vlad, Vlad got up and dashed right out the door. Bruno gasped, then chased him. Oddly enough, Vlad didn’t seem to notice that Bruno was chasing him, despite the quick sound.

Chapter 10

Toxic Punches

Bruno followed Vlad till they reached the grouped pathway. That pathway led to a giant hall filled with different paths to different groups. In front and center of the hall was a large path to Team Toxic. Vlad ran towards that path, with Bruno following him after taking a long look at the hall.

Vlad glanced around his area, later seeing doors to different rooms. They were labelled with oddly familiar names. Bruno didn't know why ~~at the time~~. He took a pause as he watched Vlad speed his way into a door. The door wrote "THE MAIN ROOM" as its main sign. Bruno approached the door, but was reluctant to knock on it because of the other sign. On the bottom of the door, a sign wrote "NON-TEAM TOXIC MEMBERS AREN'T ALLOWED", with a drawing of a member (Kyanide) letting out a raspberry to insult anyone who was daring enough to come into the premises. Bruno moaned and sighed out loud.

As soon as Bruno was about to walk away, the door opened!

Once he heard the door hum, Bruno hid right beside the corner, letting him go unnoticed by anyone passing by.

"Only if our dads could understand, huh Ivon?", a girl asked. It was Laurel, right beside and walking alongside Ivon. He seemed to be furious about something. Ivon was as red and heated as fire, maybe even the sun! "If anyone in our families **could** understand! Ugh. Unlike other children's families… ours don't!", Ivon yelled. Laurel rolled her hands around and around, trying to ignore what Ivon is

complaining about. “At least we’ve got ourselves, Ivon. Hey! Who knows? Maybe someone else will join the team! I mean, I know that the three members left the team… but things are going to be fine if we have a new one!”, Laurel said. “Mmm! And maybe… That new member will make the best meals for me!”, she swooned. Ivon growled. “Who even is going to be the new member?”, Ivon asked. “Don’t know. That’s the problem, really. They should be a good cook though!”, Laurel laughed. Ivon rolled his eyes around. The two left Bruno’s sight eventually.

“Laurel and Ivon, hungry and envious like always~”, Bruno sighed to himself. He walked beside the edge of the open door and took a slight peek through it. Once he did, he saw the team members, laughing in front of a whiteboard writing “HOW TO SCARE THE ENTIRE SCHOOL”. Bruno gasped. Being the clumsy kid that he is, Bruno tripped on a loose nail from the ground and fell like a pancake to the floor. “Oof!”, he huffed.

The team members noticed him immediately. “BRUNO!”, everyone except Vlad yelled in unison. Vlad gasped out loud with large eyes. Aster grunted while raging his fists together. He was gradually approaching the stuttering Bruno. Bruno started to dash away from the scene. “YOU WON’T GET AWAY WITH THIS!”, Aster yelled. He chased Bruno once he ran away. “You promised me!”, Aster yelled. Bruno turned his head back to look at Aster. “Oh shoot! Yeah!”, Bruno said as he realized. He continued running. He ran far enough to reach the main hall

Bruno kept on panting, almost losing his breath to the chase. His lungs nearly couldn’t take it anymore. Once he took a stop, Aster jumped and tackled him. Afterward, the two made out a barrel roll while trying to punch each other. As the two got violent, everyone noticed

and started to watch the scene unfold. The other Team Toxic members were also members of the crowd. They didn't even decide to partake in the battle until…

"Aster!", Blossom cried while pulling Aster away from the equally injured Bruno. "What?", Aster asked. Blossom shook Aster by the shoulder. "You're going to get yourself hurt!", Blossom said. "So what? Why don't you join in with the fight?", Aster asked. Bruno chuckled. "So, it's officially declared now, huh?", Bruno asked. Aster snickered, later leading out a snide, back-handed smile.

"You read my mine!", Aster said.

Everyone, who was gathered up for the event at this point, were waiting for the moment of the official fight. "It's official: It's a battle between you, me, and this good gal here, Blossom!", Aster declared. Blossom deeply gulped. "Accepted!", Bruno answered. Mercury whistled. "Go!", Mercury exclaimed.

Aster led the first punch at Bruno, which he dodged. Bruno took a punch at Aster's unwary face, letting him take a hit from Bruno. Blossom tickled Bruno soon after. Bruno was laughing like a cartoon character. This helped Aster take his next punch, which was right in the gut. That punch pushed Bruno right onto the ground.

Bruno, on the ground, thankfully dodged more of Aster's punches. He got up on the last of Aster's punches, landed behind Aster's back, then kicked Aster right on his hips. Blossom moved forward to Bruno, just to get slapped by him. She was kept on the ground.

Aster saw a sharp pencil on the ground. Being the calculated fighter that he is, he ran just in enough time to stab the pencil into

Bruno's hand. Luckily, no bruises or blood was made from the stab, but it did create notice from Bruno.

Bruno jumped right onto Aster, pulling his oddly long hair. Aster bit the boy right on the arm. "Agh!", Bruno grunted. Aster soon kicked Bruno right in the face.

Bruno was stuck on the ground while Aster walked towards Bruno. Bruno looked back, just to find his worried classmates. "Bruno, come on!", Max encouraged. "You can do it!", Winnie cheered with excitement. "Don't let those Team Toxic goons defeat you!", Carly encouraged. Bruno gasped by Carly's act.

Nonetheless, that fueled him more to win. Aster was about to pull Bruno by the leg, but he pushed his leg away from Aster's hand. As Bruno was about to run across the circled field, he bumped right onto Blossom. He gasped then blushed. Blossom frowned instantly, then punched him right in the cheeks, while they were glued to the floor.

Bruno was left on the ground, but not alone as Blossom was there. Before he knew it, Aster approached Bruno. The boy was surrounded, since behind him was Blossom and Aster was in front of him. If he tried to move to the other side, he'd get blocked by Aster anyways. "Not giving up yet? Surprised", Aster chuckled. "Blossom!", Aster commanded. Blossom nodded. She put her arm across Bruno's neck, nearly choking him, but thankfully not.

"I've always wanted to strangle a boy like you!", Blossom giggled with her innocent voice. Bruno moaned and grunted, his eyes twitching from fear. "Man. You don't know how to give up, huh?", Aster asked.

Bruno kept on breathing deeply, almost losing it. All he saw were Aster, who was taunting him in front of him, and Blossom, who was strangling him, nearly giving away his life. The rest was all darkness and visual blurs. Bruno pulled Blossom's hand away from him, then punched her cheek. Bruno tackled Aster, which led Aster to fly him into the air. Bruno could see everyone, but since he was in a panic, he didn't.

Bruno coughed and coughed once he landed on the ground. He was cornered yet again by the two, who seemed to be as injured as him oddly enough. Bruno looked around the floor and threw the same pencil Aster threw at Bruno. However, it wasn't effective.

"Why are you this way?!", Bruno suddenly asked. Aster widened his eyes, then shook his head away from something. "It's none… OF YOUR BUSINESS!", Aster yelled as he pulled Bruno by the shirt and starting to spin him around the air, soon flinging him to the audience. He landed right beside the Team Toxic member, who all seemed to be horrified. Mostly especially was Vlad though.

Aster approached Bruno with a daunting face. "So… do you give up?", Aster asked. Bruno froze. He looked at his classmates, then at Aster and Blossom. He sighed. "Y-Yes…", he answered, nearly tearing up. Everyone in the crowd gasped, both in disappointment and shock. "That's good, Bruno!", a voice came out. It was behind Bruno.

Bruno turned back to find Vlad, worried as ever. He even covered his mouth. Vlad pulled Bruno from the ground and supported him by leaning Bruno toward his shoulder. "You guys should be ashamed of yourselves!", Mercury yelled. Aster and Blossom gasped.

"What did we do wrong?! He agreed to my proposal. He should know what'd happen if he fights a Class 4 student like me", Aster

responded. Mercury huffed. “But you should know that he’s a new student. He doesn’t even know how the classes are!”, Mercury responded back. Aster grunted. He took one last, daunting look at Bruno. Soon, he stomped away from the scene with Blossom following him with her hops. “Thanks, Vlad”, Bruno smiled. The other classes walked back to their respective paths, though many also went back home. Bruno’s classmates, however, approached him and Vlad.

“That was amazing, Bruno!”, Nadia complimented. “It’s sad that you lost though…”, Riley sighed. “He should’ve won! Ugh!”, Carly complained. Bruno didn’t say a word, nor did he want to. He just wanted to take a breather from that tough battle.

“Carly, he’s fighting against a Class 4 student… like me”, Paul said. He sighed, saying “Bruno, please tell any of us about stuff like this. It’s not safe to get into a battle, especially ones like this where you’re fighting against a naturally strong student”. Bruno widened his eyes, then frowned. The Team Toxic members, who still strangely there, patted Bruno on the back.

“Aye! At least you actually decided to fight Aster!”, Kyanide complimented. “Come on, let’s go”, Mercury suggested. Vlad and Kyanide nodded. “Take care of him, guys”, Vlad said to his classmates. He, Kyanide and Mercury went back to their path. Thankfully, Bruno could stand up properly again unlike earlier.

“Say, Craig, shall we get back home?”, Marlyn asked. Craig was frozen solid. “Craig?”, Marlyn asked. Everyone else soon noticed the frozen Craig. “Craig, what’s the matter?”, Sid asked. “Mr. Gregory… MR. GREGORY WON’T LIKE THIS!”, Craig yelled with his messy hair. “Wait, you didn’t ask Mr. Gregory yet?!”, Renard exclaimed. Craig

gulped, trying to look away from his classmates. “Hmph…”, Craig huffed. Riley facepalmed. “I knew this project wouldn’t work out”, Riley said. Craig soft frowned face turned to Riley’s frustrated one. Craig sighed. “Let’s just get back home”, Craig said. Everyone looked worried at each other, then started to walk back home.

“By the way, Paul, why were you absent today?”, Roselynn asked. Paul frowned, nearly tearing up. “Ah, my grandpa died today. I had to go to his funeral earlier today”, Paul explained. Winnie frowned instantly. “Aww”, Winnie teared up. “Well, he’s in a better place now, Paul. I just know it”, Max assured. Paul smiled, wiping his one tear away. “Thanks, Max”, Paul thanked.

Everyone eventually went home and enjoyed their time till they got to sleep.

Chapter 11

Denounced

On Saturday,

Craig woke up in his swampy house, as he does every day. A door knock came to his bathroom while he was taking a shower. He sighed deeply. "*Why at a time like this*?", Craig asked. He slowly stepped out of the shower, wearing his wrapped-up towel around his body. Craig opened the door, revealing that his brother is behind. "Austin, what's the matter now?", Craig asked.

Austin lifted up an envelope that wrote "FOR CRAIG JERRY". "I got this. It says your name, so I might as well give it to you~", Austin said. "I see. I'll check it once I'm done with my shower", Craig said. Austin nodded. "Understood!", Austin responded. He walks away, down the stairs, while Craig walks back to the shower and continues his business.

Craig stepped downstairs and saw his mother making waffles while his father was reading his newspaper. "Good morning, mom and dad!", Craig greeted. "Good morning, sweetie!", his mom greeted back. Craig gave his mom a kiss on the cheek. Craig sat down beside his father and brother. "So, about that envelope…", Craig said. Austin threw it at Craig on the face. "Hey!", Craig yelled. Craig's father lifted his newspaper down and glared right at Craig. Craig squealed. "Ugh", Craig moaned.

Craig opened the envelope slowly. Once he did, he saw that the envelope came from his school. He saw a paper, possibly a letter. No, it definitely was a letter. Craig begun to read it in his mind.

"Dear Craig,

We at Open Book School would like to inform you that the hangout you built for your fellow schoolmates is not tolerated under the school banner. We prohibit letting any social building be held under our name of Open Book School. If you continue to run your hangout, then we have no choice but to suspend you from our school for good. We're afraid to say this, but we must tell you to shut down this hangout, especially after the situation that occurred on the 24th. We hope you understand, most specially your headteacher, Mr. Gregory

Regards,

Mr. Gregory

General Headteacher of Open Book School"

Craig gasped once he stopped reading. Nobody else noticed how worried Craig seemed to be, though. "Son, how has that hangout of yours going?", Craig's father asked as he took a sip of his coffee. Craig, shaking, looked at his father slowly. "It's… good…", Craig stuttered.

His mom glanced at Craig curiously. "Craig, sweetie, what's wrong?", his mom asked. "Honey, I think he's going through something", his dad then mentioned. Craig threw the letter into the envelope, later throwing the envelope right on the table. The hit was so hard that the table shook.

"Mom! Dad! Austin! The hangout is now closed!", Craig yelled. "What?", Austin asked. "THE HANGOUT IS CLOSED!", Craig repeated,

tearing up. His mom pat Craig on the shoulder. “There, there, it’s ok”, his mom assured. “What do you mean, Craig? What happened?”, his dad asked. Craig growled, pushing his mom’s hand away.

“Mr. Gregory sent this letter to me… and he said that the hangout isn’t allowed to be run!”, Craig sobbed. “It’s all because… the hangout is for the school!”, he added. Austin snickered. “Man! Craig, why can’t you just open the hangout for everyone?”, Austin asked. Craig growled again. “The hangout is built for only the Grade 8 student of my school, not for the public!”, Craig yelled. Austin sighed.

Craig jumped out his seat and begun to walk around the living room. “Oh… how are Riley and Sheldon going to feel? They already didn’t believe in me when I started this project!”, Craig cried. Austin huffed it off, while Craig’s dad continued to read his newspaper and sip his coffee. Craig’s mom came up to him and pulled him closer to her body. Craig continued to cry.

“I’ll have a talk with Mr. Gregory!”, his mom declared. “No! Don’t. He has no sense of understanding, mom!”, Craig declined. His mom sighed. “Alright then”. Craig slowly walked upstairs to his room. “Leave him be, honey. He’s growing up, which means he should learn how to survive on his own. If he has to, then he has to learn how to emotionally take care of himself”, his dad said to his mom. His mom nodded.

Meanwhile, the teachers were at the hangout, talking and laughing. “Give me a break!”, Mr. Barley laughed. Mrs. Delilah’s eyes turned into stars. “Wow, Barley! Never saw you laugh like this before since 1999”, Mrs. Delilah said. Mr. Barley froze, then took a hiccup while clearing his throat. “Excuse me”, Mr. Barley chuckled. Everyone laughed. Mrs. Garcia let down her coffee cup down to the table. The cup was empty, only leaving a trace of the teacher’s lipstick.

“By the way, Mr. Mando”, Mrs. Garcia said to grab the man’s attention. “My students have been asking me… about our friendship”, she continued. Mr. Mando gulped out loud. “They said that… maybe you have feelings for me… is it true?”, she asked. Mr. Mando started to turn red and sweat. The other teachers started snickering. “Oh, Garcia. You sweet, sweet lady”, Bruce taunted. Mrs. Garcia gripped herself away from the approaching Bruce and Jackie. “When you befriended Mando back in the 90s… You signed up for something special!”, Jackie added. Mrs. Garcia twitched herself, then looked at Mr. Mando. “Garcia! Can we have a talk?”, Mr. Mando asked. Mrs. Garcia seemed to be hesitant, but she accepted the offer otherwise. “Alright”.

Once they begun to walk out of the teacher’s area, they saw Mr. Gregory stepping in. “Mr. Gregory!?”, Mrs. Garcia gasped once he approached the two. “How did you know about this place?”, Mr. Mando asked. “Ah, Mrs. Garcia and Mr. Marcel! I’ve got some great news… about this hangout…”, Mr. Gregory smiled snidely, ignoring Mr. Mando’s question. The two gulped.

The two got pushed straight into the area, coughing. Mr. Gregory stomped inside. The teachers backed away from the area’s entrance. “Mr. G-G-Gregory!”, the art teacher stuttered. “Mi amie! We can ze explain!”, Ms. Sylvia excused. Mr. Gregory stomped one more time. Mr. Mando and Mrs. Garcia got up in a pinch. “What are you two up to this time?”, Mr. Gregory asked, raising his bitter eyebrows. “I just wanted to have a talk with Mrs. Garcia. You know how close her and I are”, Mr. Mando explained, getting up. Mr. Gregory growled. “DON’T GIVE ME EXCUSES!”, he yelled.

“Mr. Gregory! Please don’t take this too far!”, Mr. Barley said, defending the two. “Ah… Mr. Barley! Did you know that one of your

students had fought a student of Garcia's in this very building? Nice isn't it?", Mr. Gregory asked. Mr. Barley gulped. "I did!", he responded. "It's not unusual for me. My students have a fighting spirit. It's not a bad thing. It might as well be a great thing!", he added. Mr. Gregory stared at Mr. Barley, then at Mrs. Delilah. She jumped from the ground, almost falling.

"The rest of you all… Do not promote this place as a safe haven for everyone. It's not! You all already know how this school is with hangouts… especially with that old one, Drake's Palace! We're lucky that those Class 2 students showed the Class 1 students off… Hmph", Mr. Gregory ranted. The teachers were utterly silent at that time. They were mostly at a loss for words. Sadly, they were used to Mr. Gregory's pungent behavior.

"Especially you homeroom teachers… It's your responsibility! Your responsibility to take care of your students. Each of the four of you! You're all to blame for this fiasco!", Mr. Gregory accused the four. The teachers backed off from Mr. Gregory once he walked out of the door. "This hangout has been closed. Inform this news to all your students. I already did so to Craig", Mr. Gregory said coldly. The teachers couldn't see him anymore, since he was in the far distance. Their words couldn't be led out. If those words escaped, then things won't end well for anyone.

However, those words did escape but in another form. In a form of a protest.

The teachers would imitate a real protest as they all would hold up large signs that talks about true justice and freedom for all students. In a student's perspective, this seems odd for such teachers. Students and others would usually find that teachers are tough,

unruly and strict. In reality, it seems like teachers really are human—at least these teachers are!

The protest would go on for the entire weekend, even extending onto Monday. The teachers and even staff members were breaking into Mr. Gregory's office and breaking some of Mr. Gregory's stuff. Mr. Quaver even informed Mr. Flax about this situation. Mr. Flax was amused by this situation, yet he never really did anything about it. He was only a viewer of this whole debacle, or as Mr. Gregory calls it: a fiasco.

"What?!?!?!", everyone exclaimed in unison.

Those exclamations were from the students of Class 2. It seemed like Craig had announced the sudden closure of the hangout. They were stuck in the classroom, disappointed of this whole situation. "Only for 4 days? No way!", Renard yelled in denial. "It's true, my compadre", Craig responded, patting Renard right on the back while trying to hold away from tears.

"We were right, Sheldon. We were so right", Riley said as he was stepping towards Craig's way alongside Sheldon. "Look, sometimes, dreams can come true. That's the truth", Craig said. Riley paused, then inhaled and exhaled. Sheldon watched Riley as he calmed down, he later watched Craig on the ground.

"You're lucky I didn't punch you", Riley huffed. "Gee, Riley! Are you really gonna punch a classmate over this? Sure seems like you did believe hi—". Maverick got stopped by a suddenly glaring Riley. That obviously scared him.

Mrs. Garcia walked to her students, who formed an entire crowd right beside her table. This is because Craig was actually sitting right on the teacher's chair. He shouldn't have, but he did so for some

reason. “Ok, ok, what’s with the commotion here?”, Mrs. Garcia asked. “Oh, Craig said that the hangout has been cancelled”, Spencer explained. Mrs. Garcia sighed. “Right. It’s appropriate that the main founder of the hangout announces the cancellation of it”, Mrs. Garcia said. Her soft face instantly turned harsh. “Get out of my table now!”, Mrs. Garcia yelled. Craig squeaked, hopping right out of her chair and back to his. The students looked at Mrs. Garcia with their baby-doll eyes.

“Mrs. Garcia! Why can’t you have a talk with Mr. Gregory?”, Bella asked. Mrs. Garcia huffed her hair away. “I tried to, with the other teachers. He didn’t listen”, she responded. “The better question is: Why haven’t any of you gone off to talk to Mr. Gregory before opening the place?”. The students gulped while Mrs. Garcia kept to herself in the teacher’s table. “It’s Sheldon and Riley who had to speak”, Craig blamed. “Me and Riley!? How did you expect that a few students could talk to the literal headteacher of the entire school! Who, mind you, can beat down anyone he sees?”, Sheldon said. Craig rolled his eyes out.

“Kids, stop fighting. It’s too late. There’s no more changing what just happened”, Mrs. Garcia said. Craig, Sheldon and Riley looked at Mrs. Garcia, then sighed deeply.

Later onto the day, the news spread to everyone. During lunch, Craig was eating like always. Unlike the encounter with Drake, he didn’t get to eat one of Sid’s delicious cakes. Sid wasn’t even present that day, so Craig was left alone in his sorrows.

While he was eating, he got approached by Team Toxic, who didn’t seem to be too happy about the news. “Hey Craig”, Vlad greeted. “Oh! Team Toxic”, Craig exclaimed as he got around to seeing the team. “What brings you here?”, he asked. Aster grabbed Craig by the

shirt and asked, “What about the money?”. Craig pushed himself away from Aster.

“The money. Right. Uhm. You can keep it”, Craig said. Aster smiled. “But the hangout closed, didn’t it?”, Mercury asked. “Yeah, but you can keep the money I gave you”, Craig responded. He moved towards Mercury’s ear and whispered, “You know what Aster will do once he doesn’t get his money”. Mercury nodded to that. Craig clapped his hands together. “Alright then. Thanks for the money”, Mercury said. “Let’s go, guys”, he commanded. Everyone walked away from Craig, leading him to sigh in relief.

Suddenly, Bruno appeared out of nowhere. “Hey Craig!”, Bruno greeted. “Oh, hey Bruno”, Craig greeted back. “What happened there… with Team Toxic?”, Bruno asked. Craig raised an eyebrow. “Team Toxic? They were just asking about the money I’m going to give them for advertising”, Craig answered. Bruno chuckled. “It looks like there’s more to that! Can you tell me?”, Bruno asked. Craig turned his head left and right to make sure he’s not going crazy. “Why are you asking? You’re not… a part of the team now, are you?”, Craig asked.

Bruno froze, then giggled a bit more. “Uhm… I’m not saying that I’m a part of the team, but… well…”, Bruno stuttered. Craig twitched himself, then started to shake Bruno’s body around. “You want to be a part of the team?”, Craig asked. Bruno chuckled awkwardly. “Maybe…”, Bruno answered. Craig pulled Bruno by the shoulder.

“Don’t, Bruno. Please! That team always follows their namesake… They’re all toxic!”, Craig warned Bruno. Bruno pushed Craig away. “I know they are, but they have a reason why!”, Bruno said. “Because their parents are criminals?”, Craig asked. He sighed right after saying so. “Just because they have a reason doesn’t mean they’re excused for their actions”, he stated. Bruno froze. “Fair point…’, Bruno said. Craig looked around, then at Paul. “I’ve got to go

now", Craig excused. He walked towards Paul. Bruno was left in the distance, alone.

"Nobody understands, don't they?", Bruno thought. Bruno looked at the Team Toxic table and frowned softly. *"They must've gone through a lot..."*, Bruno thought even more. *"Maybe... if I join their team. Maybe they'll understand and everyone will be happy!"*. Bruno smiled at the team, even if nobody's noticing him the slightest.

Alex approached Bruno slowly. "What's wrong, Bruno?", Alex asked. Bruno pushed himself to see Alex in the face. "Alex! Do you know what happened in the past for Team Toxic?", Bruno asked. Alex sighed instantly. "You're still going on and on about that team, aren't you?", Alex asked. Alex tried to brush everything off, but after seeing Bruno's upset face, he gave in. "Fine. I'm going to tell you", Alex hesitantly said.

Alex and Bruno took a seat at another table. A table all to themselves in the sorrow shadow of the cafeteria. "As you might know, the team's parents are all criminals. So, let me explain further about them", Alex said. He cleared his throat. Right before he could even talk, though, he got stopped by the ringing school bell! "Shoot. Too late", Alex swore. Bruno sighed. "It's fine", he assured.

The two walked back to their classes, with the Team Toxic members watching in the background. "Ugh. He would've exposed us!", Kyanide yelled. "Glad he didn't", Vlad said. Mercury pushed everyone away. "Let's get back to class already", Mercury said. The rest of the team follows him as he gets back.

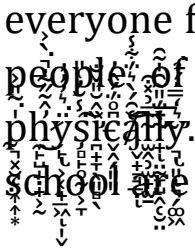
"See you!", Laurel said as she waved goodbye. The others seemed to be confused as Laurel and Ivon walked away from the main corridor. They shrugged their confusions off anyways.

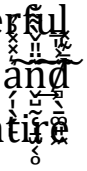
Chapter 12

Reopening

The next morning,

Mr. Gregory was taking his way to Class 2. He went through Class 4, which was right beside Class 2. That feared Class 4 by a lot, though everyone fears Mr. Gregory. Not only is he one of the most powerful people of the school, but he's also a brutal man; Verbally and physically. He's so feared that even the strongest class of the entire school are cowards towards him.





The man finally entered the classroom after hushing the mouths of a couple of kids who roamed around the hall. When he did, he opened the door ever so slightly to not scare the children in the door. What he saw behind it were the students talking and talking about the shutdown.

He finally opened to door. Once the students saw Mr. Gregory, they instantly froze in a fixed and straight position. Mrs. Garcia turned her body to face him. "Ah, Mr. Gregory!", she smiled. Mr. Gregory glanced at the students, then looked at Mrs. Garcia. "Mrs. Garcia, may I have a talk with your students?", Mr. Gregory asked. Mrs. Garcia looked at them, after bearing a fake smile at the daunting man. "Sure!", she answered.

Mr. Gregory cleared his throat. "I know most, if not all, of you have heard the news of the recent shutdown of Craig's Ground. I and the staff know how disappointment you and your fellow schoolmates are. I understand deeply about your grief. Sadly, we can't do anything

about it", Mr. Gregory stated. Mrs. Garcia watched as her students listened to him rambling. She finally stomped at some point of the speech.

"Mr. Gregory", Mrs. Garcia said. That grabbed Mr. Gregory's attention to the lovely lady. "What is it, ma'am?", Mr. Gregory asked. Mrs. Garcia pulled the man by the shoulder. "Gregory. I can't count how many times I begged and plead for a hangout! Here is it now! One of my students created one! And you… you didn't want any of that!?", she yelled suddenly. The students gasped in unison. Mr. Gregory pulled up his almost-fallen down glasses and begun to stutter himself.

"Erk! What do you mean, Garcia?", Mr. Gregory, pulling himself from the lady. He looked at the students like a coward. "Call me Mrs. Garcia first", she requested. Mr. Gregory sighed. "Look, I don't remember a time you've begged me to start a hangout or social place or whatever non-sense that is!", Mr. Gregory said. "Hmm. Maybe it's because, oh I don't know, the last time I asked was in 1999? You know—when these students have been born!?!", Mrs. Garcia yelled in some sarcastic way. "1999? You must've asked Mr. Flax", Mr. Gregory said. Mrs. Garcia stopped like a red light came in. "Oh… right…", Mrs. Garcia said. She shook herself around, brushing off the logic.

"Still! These poor students have been working endlessly for years! Can't we just give them a break and let them socialize? I know they already do but… they barely even have any time to get along. Know each other. Spend time, make memories with each other. I know how hard it has been because… me and Sylvia took years to get along back in school, and it's because we've been working way too much, so we didn't have any time to spend unless it's the weekend. Things still hasn't changed in the education department… but how about the time spent?", Mrs. Garcia said to make at least a tip of a point for Mr. Gregory, a stubborn man.

Mr. Gregory and the students were all left in silence. “Factually, the teacher is right”, Max said. “The things that fuel a good friendship are not only having the qualities of a good friends, but spending time and getting to know your friends well. Warmer memories will create warmer, sweeter friendships”. Mr. Gregory growled harshly in front of everyone. However, he didn’t a single word. “It’s true!”, Alex said. Bruno nodded to that. “Even if a friendship has already developed well-enough, you could still make new friends, maybe even cultivate a new skill if it’s an introvert we’re talking about”, Craig said. Mr. Gregory glared at everyone.

“The assembly will start now”, Mr. Gregory announced. He started to walk out of class. Once the man walked right out of the door, not even shutting it, the students looked at each other. “An assembly!?”, Sid suddenly exclaimed after a lot of minutes passed. Mrs. Garcia sighed. With a demented look, she ordered, “Students, make a line. We have to go”. The students did so, following their dear old teacher’s order. *“It’s almost like Greg never even went to school…”*, she whispered to herself. Casper, who was unfortunately first in the line, looked at her with a sad, almost worried expression on his face.

Everyone was at the assembly. From those at Class 1 to those in Class 4 dG8gZXZlbiB0aG9zZSBpbiBDbGFzcyA5. It doesn’t matter which class, everyone needed to be there for an important, yet unspecified reason.

In a straight line, and in straight attention, everyone watched as Mr. Gregory came up to the stage and got his microphone ready. Once it did, he said, “Good morning students and teachers. Today, I’d love to announce something important”. The students got their mind ready for the speech trip. However, that didn’t happen. For the first time: Mr. Gregory got to the point.

“Social centers are banned at any capacity from the school. We do not want to associate with such hangouts or whatsoever. No matter the reason, nothing will justify breaking such a rule. Please don’t let something like Craig’s Ground or Drake’s Palace occur again. Those are fiascos in our watch”, Mr. Gregory said in a commanding tone. The students were frozen solid in front of Mr. Gregory.

“I’d beg to differ!”, a voice came out. It was a pale, high-pitched voice. It was… Steven Spin! The head honcho of the entire school!

Steven spun his way to Greg in his signature graceful way. Meanwhile, Mr. Gregory was watching in amusement. “What do you mean? Aren’t those the rules you laid out, Mr. Spin?”, Mr. Gregory asked. Mr. Spin started laughing like crazy, then paused with a furious expression. “No. Those are the rules **you** laid out; not me”, Mr. Spin said with a straight face.

Mr. Gregory led out a huge gulp while the students watched this happen. Some wanted to burst out laughing, while others were uniquely amused by what’s going on. It’s as if a school play is going on! “What? No, no, no, that can’t be right! You told me bef—“. Mr. Gregory got stopped by Mr. Spin. “That’s when you first applied for the job in 2009!”, Mr. Spin said. “Times have changed, Mr. Gregory. Not only that, but that rule has never appeared in any rule book, nor on the school’s website”.

Craig gasped in excitement. It could be heard since he was the second of his class’s line. “Which means… I can open the hangout again?”, Craig asked. Mr. Spin looked at Craig, then nodded excitingly. “Of course, Craig! You know, I’ve always wanted to go to that hangout of yours. It’s impressive especially for a child like you!”, Mr. Spin complimented. Craig chuckled. “Well, I couldn’t have done it without the help of Riley and Sheldon… and my classmates”, he responded. The Class 2 students smiled wide.

“Wow! Kids nowadays are much more impressive than I thought. I guess that new phone invention really won’t get in the way of the student’s young mind!”, Mr. Spin laughed, looking at the statue that is Mr. Gregory. He burst out those metaphorical rocks away as he blew up in rage. “Mr. Spin, this is ridiculous! You do know that this hangout thing will hinder the student’s intelligence tremendously!?”, Mr. Gregory yelled. Mr. Spin stared right at Mr. Gregory’s angered eyes. “And? At least they’ll experience freedom unlike us”, Mr. Spin argued.

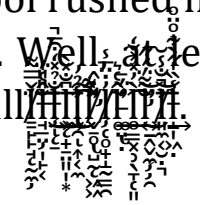
Mr. Gregory growled right on stage, but that didn’t matter to Mr. Spin. He gripped the mike. “Students! Craig’s Ground may be… reopened!!”, Mr. Spin sung. The students cheered together. It’s a surprise that a window hasn’t even broke from the screams! Mr. Spin was spinning along the stage and humming some tunes. In the background, the teachers and even Ms. Kiara were celebrating. “We can finally take a break from all the madness!”, Mr. Mando cheered. Mr. Barley took a confetti gun and sprayed it at Mrs. Delilah. “Eek!”, Mrs. Delilah squeaked. The teachers laughed.

“Look at all the smiles, Greg!”, Mr. Spin said. Mr. Gregory rolled his eyes in protest, though Spin didn’t notice.

Chapter 13

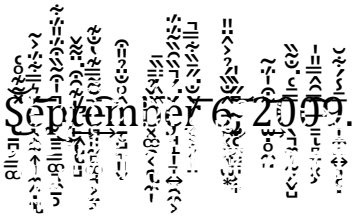
Gregory's Intentions

The next day, the hangout opened. Everyone after school rushed into the hangout, getting ready to stay there for a lifetime. Well, at least the lifetime of the hangout. Everyone was happy untilllllllllllll.



I came to the hangout and saw everything that was going on. I was amused by everything. By the students enjoying their time and laughing with each other. It was truly a spectacle to me. Kids having fun like this? I've never seen such a sight in my lifetime. I'm surprised that Team Toxic isn't even terrorizing the entire grade. That's their job. I guess things truly have changed ever since I came into the

school in 2009. September 6, 2009.



Soon enough, the principal, Mr. Steven Spin, came up to me in his signature spinning manner. He always amuses me, that Steven man. “Hey , you’re busy right now?”, Mr. Spin asked. I answered with a harsh no. “Look, can you tell me why you’re so strict? Other than things changing of course!”, Mr. Spin laughed. I pushed him out of the building and into the grassy fields. “

”, I explained.

Mr. Spin… no… Steven, took his eyes to me and I’m pretty sure he understood me. I then looked at him amusingly. Never have I ever saw him in this light. “How shocking!”, Steven said. I nodded.

I felt rage afterward. I don’t know why, but I did. I jumped and tackled right into Steven’s gut, nearly creating a wound for him. Steven gasped, then threw me back to a nearby tree. I got up, punching him afterward. Steven grabbed my fists right on the second punch to prevent himself from getting further injured. He pulled me by the grabbed fist and threw me into mud, which angered me more. Understandable for a person like me. I got up, full of mud around my body and clothes, pouncing right into Steven’s body. Once I did, Steven scratched me on the face. I let the last blow on him by kicking him in the stomach. We were bruised and injured at this point.

“ , why are you doing this?”, Steven asked. I finally got back to normal as I widened my eyes up and soften my cheeks. I got myself elevated from Steven’s body and stood up. Steven was coughing when getting up. “I’m sorry. I got a bit crazy!”, I apologized. “It’s ok”, Steven forgave. I sighed, walked up to the door and saw the students walked to their pathway. I saw the Team Toxic members going. I thought that maybe I could have a talk with them about their actions. Well, I was before Steven stopped my plans.

“So, it looks like I know why now!”, Steven exclaimed. I giggled. “I think you’ve got a couple of jobs to finish now, Steve”, I said. Steven agreed and walked away. I didn’t care much to say goodbye though. I walked up to the Team Toxic members… but there were only two! I think Blossom and Aster were their names? They were talking when I came. I don’t know about what, but they were talking. “Hello, hello!”, I greeted. The two sighed when they turned back to see me.

“Hi Mr. Gregory”, the girl greeted—or Blossom. I smiled awkwardly. I didn’t want to be there to be honest, but at the same time, I wanted to teach those Team Toxic goons a lesson. It looks like it’s too late though! “What’s wrong now?”, Aster asked. I thought about it and came up with something. “I’ve heard that a new member’s coming”, I said. The two gasped, as if they didn’t know. Actually, they didn’t as they told me. “Really?!”, Blossom exclaimed. “I don’t think there is going to be a new one. If there’d be, then we’d hear about it”, Aster said. Blossom snapped her finger and stomped on the ground. “Wait a minute!”, she exclaimed. “I’ve heard that Vlad’s thinking about recruiting a new member”. I gasped and got excited. “What is it?”, I asked.

“Bruno”, Blossom said. Aster gulped. “Bruno?!”, Aster yelled. “Look, it’s Vlad who picked who’ll join, ok?”, Blossom asked second-handedly. I was as shocked as Aster. I only knew Bruno as a sweet, innocent boy. Why would he join a team of hooligans? “Well, we gotta go now”, Aster said. The two walked to the pathway as I was left alone.

My train of thought was going wild once I was walking out of the hangout building. I looked at myself. I looked at myself. , there’s something wrong with you, right?

Bruno would join? Bruno out of anyone? Bruno? Brunő? Bruno? Bruno? Bruno? Bruno? Bruno? Bruno? Bruno? ?????

THE END